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VOL. 56 No. 4

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FEBRUARY, 1933

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The \$40,000,000 Blue Book

As this issue of the Blue Book goes to press, we find ourselves intimately concerned with a real and important international mystery that in character and interest closely approximates the Free Lances in Diplomacy stories of Clarence Herbert New.

In 1916 and 1917 the terrific Black Tom and Kingsland explosions in New Jersey caused enormous destruction of property and serious loss of life. These disasters were attributed to agents of the Central Powers who sought thus to prevent munitions reaching the Allies. As a result claims amounting to some forty million dollars have been for years in litigation; at the present writing, the matter is up before the German and American Mixed Claims Commission in Washington for final decision. *And the whole case now appears to hang on the authenticity of a letter written in sympathetic ink on a page of the January, 1917, Blue Book Magazine!*

A copy of that issue lies before us: it was a good number, containing excellent stories by able and famous writers—but it rather takes our breath away to find it a deciding factor in a forty-million-dollar lawsuit. We presume it was chosen as the vehicle for the secret letter—if that letter is authentic—by way of further camouflage. For a number of our writers declared war long before the nation did; and the 1917 Blue Book was about the last magazine one would suspect an enemy sympathizer of reading. Anyhow, it is all a tremendously interesting story from any point of view; and we hope to present it in detail to our readers—

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Next Month?

"PEARLS"

A lively tale of love and war on tropic seas

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The Sportsman's

V—The "Iron Horse"

MAN O' WAR won a baker's dozen races; the lamented "wonder horse," Phar Lap, came home in front thirty-six times in fifty starts. But forty-odd years ago, the "old iron horse" was smashing his way to fame and glory. Never a champion, he caused many an uneasy moment for the owners of champions, as he was a threat at all times.

"Barnum," they called him—a gelding by Bonnie Scotland—and when they dropped the flag the last time behind his flying heels he had won *one hundred* races. He was an honest, tough-as-rawhide thoroughbred; game clear down to his racing plates, he either won or was close-up in anything in which he started.

The year 1886 witnessed one of his most notable contests. The Coney Island Cup that year promised to be a great race. Troubadour, winner of the Suburban, and Miss Woodford, the Dwyer brothers' winner of the Eclipse, were expected to meet. At the last moment, Troubadour was withdrawn and the ever-willing and ready Barnum was added. Eole, the aged pet of racegoers, was the third starter.

Miss Woodford was at the zenith of her form and fame. She had beaten "Lucky" Baldwin's Volante, Ed Corrigan's Modesty and others of proven worth. She was a pet of the public, and before the start of the Coney Cup of '86, she was made the top-heavy favorite at odds of one-to-ten. Old Barnum went to the post with ten-to-one against him and Eole, that never figured, was quoted at fifteen-to-one.

The course was crowded with a milling host. Miss Woodford's name was on every tongue. Win? Without a struggle! Barnum was there but to fill in!

The withdrawal of Troubadour was a bitter disappointment to the crowd, for he, the really great horse of Captain Sam Brown, would surely have made the best mare on the turf extend herself.

Finally, out they came, Miss Woodford daintily mincing along, seemingly

Scrapbook

By Ewing Walker

conscious of the burst of cheering that greeted her appearance. The aged Eole followed, champing at his bit and shaking his head fretfully, as though he would at least simulate youthfulness. And then old Barnum, walking placidly in a matter-of-fact fashion, much as a plow-horse might proceed toward the field. Was the track heavy or fast? It mattered not to the old "iron horse." He'd give them the best he had; he'd fight and drive his way around that track to the utmost capacity of his honest heart and tough sinews.

Off they went, with a roar from the crowd, a flashing flag, a shower of mud from flying hoofs. Barnum was in front; he went out and made the pace from the first, Miss Woodford lying back, her rider thinking he could close on and pass the old campaigner whenever he wished. On they whirled around that historic track, Barnum still making the pace—and he made it so well that, as they entered the final run for home Miss Woodford found great difficulty reducing the gap between them.

It was an epoch-marking finish, both horses showing superb gameness. On they fought toward the judges' stand. Slowly—so slowly the crowd stared and breathed hard—the mare crept up on Barnum. Her nose was at his rump, his saddle-girth, his shoulder; at last they flashed under the wire nose and nose. The judges pronounced it a dead heat.

It was one of the greatest races this country has witnessed and far too little has been said of it. The track that day was extremely heavy, and yet they ran that heart-breaking mile-and-three-quarters in 3:07¼—just 12½ seconds slower than the American record today, which was established on a modern lightning-fast track thirty-eight years later.

The owner of Barnum wanted to run the stake off then and there; but the Dwyers, unwilling to subject their mare to another such grueling, yielded the purse to the gallant old war-horse.

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The Eternal

The moving story of a very gallant gentleman who had known three high moments in his life—and chose to end it for the sake of tasting again the rare wine of glory.

By ROY CHANSLOR



THERE was a vast bitterness in the heart of the gaunt, sunken-faced man in the ill-fitting suit who sat on that sun-drenched bench in Madison Square Park, his cold light blue eyes fixed on the Eternal Light across the way, the light which burned for the dead of France and Flanders.

A vast bitterness, and a terrible aching envy. They were the lucky ones, those honored dead, thought Zach Thompson, as his eyes dropped from the Eternal Light to the long thin hand which clutched his left knee, and then flickered briefly to the right knee, where his other hand, if he still possessed another hand, should have been.

A faint smile came over his face as his eyes turned to the sleeve pinned against the loose coat; then he looked down at his right leg, held stiffly and awkwardly outstretched, and smiled again. For a moment he was again young Zach Thompson, second-best pistol shot in the Fifth Marines, the young Zach Thompson who had come out of the plains of Wyoming, out of the saddle, to glory at Soissons, at Blanc Mont Ridge. . . .

For a moment again he tasted the wine of adventure, felt the strange, almost impersonal exaltation of action, as there flashed back through his mind the picture of the berserk young Zach Thompson, running a hundred yards ahead of his own line, through his own barrage, attacking, in a mad ecstasy, single-handed that machine-gun nest which his swift-grenade was to hurl into confusion.

"A charmed life" he had seemed to

have, according to the citation. In hand-to-hand conflict he had killed three and captured nine, while his right hand, the steady Wyoming-trained hand which had made him the second-best pistol shot in the regiment, hung useless at his side, useless now forever—while his left hand used the automatic.

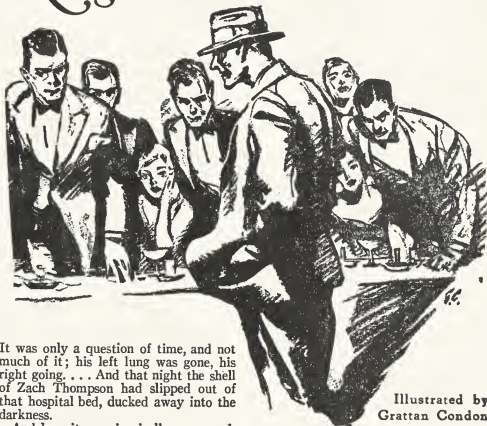
And then, as he had prodded his prisoners across the fire-swept hundred yards, that shell had struck, killing four of his prisoners, crushing the right leg from under him, the right leg which was now half steel and silver. But he had brought the five living prisoners in, two of them carrying him, while he menaced them all with his automatic.

"A charmed life!" Abruptly the moment of exaltation passed, the bitterness flooded back over him, and he stared again at the Eternal Light and cursed his "charmed life." Of what use was it to him now? It was almost gone. The body which had come through, keeping that spark of life, had been struck by an even grimmer hand.

A week ago, in the hospital, in Washington, they'd told him the truth at last.

Light

Greco screamed once, and—too late—grabbed for the gun in his shoulder holster.



Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

It was only a question of time, and not much of it; his left lung was gone, his right going. . . . And that night the shell of Zach Thompson had slipped out of that hospital bed, ducked away into the darkness.

And here it was, ironically, on a park bench, facing the Eternal Light, holding a heart consumed with bitterness—a bitterness generated not by what he had lost in France but by what the fates, in their irony, had in store for him now. For Zach Thompson had only one regret, and that regret was that the light which burned for the dead of France and Flanders did not burn for him.

Why couldn't he have died, gallantly, at the summit of ecstasy, as he charged that machine-gun nest? Why couldn't he have pegged off decently, with his boots on, as befitted a man of action? That was the bitterness in the heart of the gaunt, sunken-faced man in the ill-fitting suit as he sat on the bench in Madison Square Park in the sunshine and stared at the Eternal Light.

And why, of all places, was he here? He hadn't wanted to pass on in a hospital bed; that's why he'd sneaked away. But why hadn't he made his way back to the open air, back to Wyoming, to die? Why had he come to this monstrous city to

meet the dull end? He shook his head, slowly. He didn't know.

Once clear of the hospital, there'd been a feeling, a kind of crazy hunch, which had led him back to New York, the city he had seen but once before. That was when he'd marched to the dock to embark for France. He'd come back through the city, but he hadn't seen it. An ambulance had met the ship, and he'd been whisked through the streets to the Pennsylvania Station, on his way to the hospital.

FOURTEEN years! Not all in the hospital, of course. They hadn't held him long, that first time. He'd fooled them; he'd gone back to Wyoming then, to Laramie, near where once he'd lived his care-free life as a cow-puncher, where he'd learned the skill which had made him the second-best pistol shot in the Fifth Marines. And he'd got his old job back too, or what the boss tried to make him think was his old job. And he'



There flashed back through his mind the picture of the berserk Zach Thompson, attacking single-handed, that machine-gun nest.

learned, all over again, how to shoot, with his left hand.

But it wasn't the same in Wyoming. You weren't much good on a cattle-ranch with only one arm and with a leg made stiff with silver and steel. And Zach Thompson didn't care for pity. He'd finally drifted along, here, there, everywhere, a misfit, but getting by, after a fashion, thanks to his Government money—until a few months ago when that crimson spring which gushed from his lips had finally brought him down. It wasn't gas, but just lowered resistance which left him nothing to kick out those germs with. So the hospital again, months in bed; and finally, a week ago, the death-warrant.

He wrinkled his forehead, wondering again about that crazy hunch which had brought him here. He didn't like the city, really. He supposed he hated it, and it was certainly no place for a man with half a lung. But he'd had to ride his hunch, as he'd always ridden them.

He knew what he wanted, all right. He wanted to recapture, just once more, something that the young Zach Thompson had felt in the big moments of his life. Those were the glorious moments, when

prudence, caution, all thought of self, of consequences, had vanished, burned away in the fire of elation.

Three of them he had had in his life: the time, when he was a kid, and he'd plunged into the swirling rapids above a tumbling waterfall and pulled out another kid, just before they both went over; the time, when he was twenty, a hastily-sworn-in deputy sheriff, when he'd faced a lynching mob and had walked through them, with his prisoner, to the train which secured just trial for the trembling man; finally, the time when he'd cut from his line, run through his own barrage and flung himself on that machine-gun nest.

He wanted a fourth time, now, before he died. And that crazy hunch had brought him here!

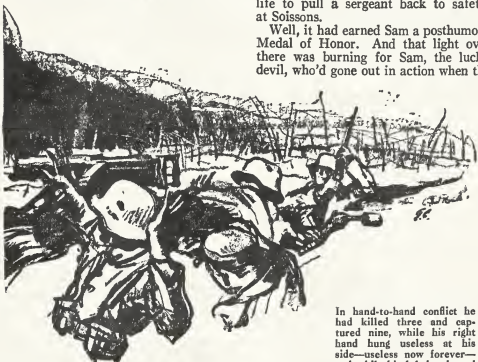
HIS cold light blue eyes moved about him curiously, for the first time noticing something besides that light. About him were ragged men. Bums! That's what he was now, a bum, even if he did have forty dollars in his pocket. But across from him, several benches down, sat one who didn't look like a bum. Zach surveyed him curiously.

He was a dark young man, probably not twenty-five, sleek, well-dressed; and if Zach Thompson knew fear when he saw it,—and he'd seen it enough to have more than a speaking acquaintance with it,—this young man, who was certainly not a bum, was scared half to death.

He sat on his bench all alone, and his

Sam had admitted it often; but when the die was cast, when the men came up out of the mud and started for the enemy, Sam had always been a lion. It was this very fear, Sam had said, which had driven him when he'd won the Croix de Guerre. And Zach supposed it had ridden Sam again when he'd laid down his life to pull a sergeant back to safety, at Soissons.

Well, it had earned Sam a posthumous Medal of Honor. And that light over there was burning for Sam, the lucky devil, who'd gone out in action when the



In hand-to-hand conflict he had killed three and captured nine, while his right hand hung useless at his side—useless now forever—and while his left hand used the automatic.

eyes flickered back and forth, up and down the street. The muscles in his temples, in his throat, were working, working as Zach had seen them working on men about to be hanged, or on strangely possessed men, about to go over the top.

Zach Thompson wondered about this fear which gripped the dark young man. Fear was a strange phenomenon to Zach, or had been until this last terrible week. He had never been able to understand it, until so recently that he hadn't quite got it figured out yet.

Of course, there was fear and fear. One kind he despised; the other, although he had never understood it, he dismissed as the quivering, nervous excitation of a highly organized, sensitive temperament which he himself had never possessed. That was the kind of fear which Sam Campbell, a pal of the Fifth Marines, had often seemed to show, just before the outfit went into action.

blood raced, and life, for an instant, had some meaning.

But it wasn't that kind of fear which seemed to chain that sleek dark young man to his bench. His was the kind of fear that Zach despised, the fear of the rat. Zach wondered, idly, about the man for a moment, looked up and down the street too, to see if he could spot what was eating the fellow, saw nothing, and dismissed him from his mind. . . .

A woman was coming down the sidewalk toward Zach, leading a little girl by the hand. She was an ordinary-looking woman, probably about thirty, not pretty, but sweet-looking. And the little girl was lovely. Zach watched them as they came closer, heard the little girl laugh, happily, felt a strange constriction of his throat.

And the fear which had always been a stranger to him, until these last few days, came back, and he shivered. He was not afraid of death, of course;

hadn't he shown that, time and again? It was just the kind of death he had to face, now. To cough out his life, a pitiful, germ-eaten wreck of a man! Why was this his destiny, Zach Thompson, Medal of Honor man?

"*This gallant soldier*," the citation had described him. Was this the way for a gallant soldier to die? And then, as the woman and the child came opposite him, Zach dropped his eyes suddenly. He was ashamed. Wasn't this bitterness, this envy of the hero dead for which the light burned so steadily, a kind of cowardice? Couldn't he still be the gallant soldier?

And he decided, in that moment, that he could. He raised his eyes to look again at the woman and the little girl. They were passing the fear-ridden dark young man on the bench. Suddenly Zach saw him jump to his feet, twitching with terror. And then—Zach heard that sound!

He saw the frightened wretch stagger. Then, with horror, he saw the rat hurl himself close to the woman and the child, screaming with fear. The hair on the back of Zach's neck seemed to prick him. He lurched to his feet. He heard the

sound again, the *rat-tat-tat* of a machine-gun.

And then there were three figures on the sidewalk, the woman, the child and the rat. Zach whirled about, saw the black sedan flash around the corner, the ominous black sedan. But Zach Thompson was no longer thinking of the bitterness in his heart. There was room there for only one emotion, a terrible cold rage.

Then he was limping toward the figures on the walk. The park bums had vanished, as if catapulted. Several people were hurrying toward the scene from across the Square, a patrolman at their head, running.

Zach Thompson had seen too many victims of gun-fire not to know that the woman and the child were dead. But there was a tell-tale twitch which proved that the rat beside them still had a spark or two of life.

There was only one thought in the mind of Zach Thompson now. He dropped beside the dying gangster, turned his head, looked into his eyes.

"Who done it, buddy?" he said.

"I aint no rat," said the man.

"Yes, you are; but that don't matter now," said Zach. "Who done it?"



His fingers convulsively pulling the trigger, Zach crumpled on the sidewalk.

The patrolman was nearly up to them now. Zach knew he had to get a name and get it quick.

"I won't squeal," said Zach intensely. "I'm no copper. I'm a hood from Chi, and I wanta know who staged this caper! Make it fast, buddy; here comes the flatfoot."

Something in the cold blue eyes above him must have reassured the man, for he opened his lips, whispered softly, "*Greco's mob!*" and died.

Frank Greco! The great Greco! The big shot of the Atlantic seaboard! The mob chief who held a dozen States in the palm of his hand! The man whose nod spelled death. Zach Thompson thanked God for the hunch that had brought him face to face with his great opportunity, thanked God for making possible the achievement of his fourth high moment.

The patrolman was bending over the woman and the child now. There was a terrible second of silence, and then the patrolman began to curse, the steady,

Again the slow shake of the head.

"He didn't say nothing at all."

"You're a liar," rasped the patrolman. "I heard him say something. He ratted before he died. Who was behind this?"

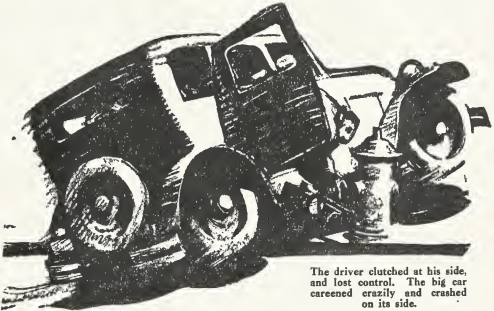
"He didn't say nothing," Zach repeated stolidly. . . .

They held Zach Thompson as a material witness. He didn't complain, but he didn't tell what the dying man had told him; he nursed that name to his heart, turning the endless questions of police and district attorney with his stonily reiterated:

"He didn't say nothing, nothing at all."

For Zach Thompson had once more found a meaning to life; he had found something to die for. The police commissioner denounced him; the papers railed at him. He was the only witness. A woman and child had been wantonly murdered by underworld scum. Yet he wouldn't talk.

The underworld had intimidated him, the editorials said. He was afraid for his life. Zach smiled grimly. Even when



The driver clutched at his side, and lost control. The big car careened crazily and crashed on its side.

meaningless, unblasphemous cursing of shock and hate.

He turned toward Zach, who pulled himself to his feet. His eyes asked a question. Zach shook his head.

"Did you see 'em, Jack?" asked the patrolman.

Zach shook his head again.

"Did he say anything?" the patrolman asked.

the district attorney called him "coward," a name no man had ever called him before, Zach Thompson just smiled grimly and kept his own counsel.

And when they took him before the Grand Jury, he only repeated:

"He didn't say nothing, nothing at all."

The case died down; public indignation cooled, as it has a way of doing; and Zach Thompson, material witness, was

released, now more dead than alive, with only his grim purpose to keep him on his feet

When he was free once more, Zach returned to the cheap hotel near Madison Square where he had left his few belongings. He hadn't told the police his address, because he had something among his things he didn't want them to find.

They'd held his room for him. Zach settled his bill up to date, and then paid for the coming night in advance. After that he had just a quarter left. That was all right. He wanted to clean things up.

When he reached his room he fumbled among his few possessions in the closet. He found what he was looking for, his old service automatic. It was the something he hadn't wanted the police to find. He had work for it.

He looked at it fondly, patted it. Then he laid it down on the dresser and flopped himself down on top of the bed. When he could no longer make out the gun on the dresser, he got up, turned on the light, took a folded newspaper from his pocket.

He smiled pleasantly as he read, for the twentieth time, the one piece of news which interested him. Frank Greco, New York's Public Enemy Number One, was holding a gala dinner that night in the Rose Gardens, on the Post Road, out in the Bronx. All the big shots of the underworld, the big shots everyone knew for murderers, crooks, who were above the law, because no one dared invoke it against them, whose only courts were presided over by Judge Rod, would be there. It was going to be quite a party. It was the Great Greco's thirtieth birthday.

Zach put the folded piece of paper back in his pocket. He chuckled softly to himself as he loaded the automatic. It was a lucky break he'd been released today. It would have been a shame not to celebrate the Great Greco's thirtieth birthday party.

NOW it was time to get going. It was a long way to the Rose Gardens by subway, and quite a walk, he knew, after he reached the nearest station. And he didn't have money for taxi fare.

An orderly man, Zach Thompson checked out of the hotel. He limped to the East Side subway station at Brooklyn Bridge. As the train thundered under the city Zach Thompson smiled, happily. And why shouldn't he smile? He

was once again the young Zach Thompson of the old Jyrenes. . . .

The festivities at the Rose Gardens were at their height, the big shots and their blonde dolls were warm with wine and contented with rich food when Zach Thompson sauntered into the big room. No one paid any attention to the gaunt, sunken-faced man; everyone's eyes were on the speaker's table, where Frank Greco, resplendent in evening dress, his face flushed, was rising to his feet.

There was a salvo of applause, cheers, whistles, the stamping of feet. The Great Greco bowed, smiled—finally, with the lordly air of an emperor, raised his hand, commanded silence.

"Ladies—" he began in his sonorous voice, sweeping the room with his dark eyes, "and gentlemen."

AND then his eyes fell upon Zach Thompson, who was limping toward him; and a hundred and fifty other pairs of eyes followed his. Zach Thompson, like a specter at the feast, bore limpingly down upon New York's Public Enemy Number One. There was a happy smile on his face.

It was almost a silly smile. The Great Greco thought it was silly, in fact, and was about to laugh, good-naturedly, before he had this haggard drunk thrown out, when he caught a glimpse of those cold light blue eyes.

Frank Greco knew a thing or two; and of the things he knew was the look in a killer's eyes. He was looking into them now, and he knew it, and his flushed face went gray; he tried to shout, hoarsely, his wits slow to grasp this incredible thing. This clown was going to kill him!

The lords of the underworld order their lives according to one fixed belief; that all men love life and will not willingly throw it away. That's why it was difficult for Frank Greco to grasp, immediately, the significance of those cold blue eyes. Impossible that a man would be such a fool as to dare to shoot him down before his own kind! It was idiotic, suicide!

Frank Greco screamed once, and too late, grabbed for the gun in his shoulder holster. But the gaunt, sunken-faced man, the fanatic Nemesis, fired once from his coat pocket, with his trained left hand, and Frank Greco slid awkwardly to one side, clutched at the man next him, then fell full length on the floor.

Now the heavy service pistol was out of Zach Thompson's pocket, and the red

flamed for the first time in years in his wasted cheeks, and the blood raced through his veins, as it had that day at Blanc Mont Ridge. The automatic swept back and forth in front of the chests of the six Big Shots of New York.

Their eyes were not for the late seventh Big Shot, Frank Greco, Public Enemy Number One, as he coughed his life out on the floor, but for the gaunt man who still held the lives of one or more of them, at least, in the palm of his thin left hand. They shook their heads in unison, like six mechanical dolls. And a hundred guns which had come out of shoulder holsters were lowered. They could have shot this cadaverous killer to pieces, of course, but some of them would have got hit too.

A man near the door slipped quickly from the room, a messenger of death. Zach saw him go, out of the corner of his eye, then heard his running footsteps. He smiled, and this time no one thought it was a silly smile, and the guns began to come up again, just in case this maniac took it into his lame brain to try to shoot it out.

It didn't really matter to Zach. He'd just as soon have died there, with his gun spurring, taking a couple of hoods with him; but as long as they didn't want it that way, it was okay with him. He'd squared the account, according to his own lights; he'd got the man responsible for the murder of that woman and that lovely little girl.

He stood waiting, the smile still on his lips, willing to give the man who had slipped away plenty of time to prepare for the party outside. No one spoke. Then Zach began to move backward, toward the door.

The long hallway leading to the street entrance was deserted. The waiters, the management, didn't want to be in range when the bullets began to fly. Zach closed the big doors, locked them. He didn't want to be shot in the back.

HE began to stump slowly down the hallway. He was happy, exultant; there was a song in his heart. He was going to die as he wished, in action. And as he neared the door, and saw the inevitable black sedan with the drawn curtains parked across the street with motor running, the song in his heart came to his lips.

Zach Thompson had never had much of a singing voice, and now he didn't have much lung-power to push out what

voice he had left, but he tried. And the words he sang, in his hoarse voice, as he stumped down the long hallway, began like this:

*"From the halls of Montezuma,
To the shores of Tripoli,
We fight our country's battles,
On the land and on the sea."*

He sang the old Marine song with a rollicking rhythm, on through the well-remembered verses, until he had reached the door. Then he raised his voice to its last pitch and cried out the final lines defiantly to the men in the black sedan:

*"If the Army and the Navy,
Ever gaze on heaven's scenes,
They will find the streets all guarded
By United States Marines!"*

With the last word a wild cry, Zach lurched out onto the sidewalk like a drunken man. And he was drunk, but not with alcohol. He came out shooting, and a scream of pain from the black sedan brought an answering laugh from Zach Thompson.

THEN Zach's namesake, the sub-machine gun called Thompson, drowned out the scream and the laugh with its *rat-tat-tat*. The black sedan sprang forward; gears meshed; and Zach, his finger convulsively pulling the trigger which loosed his final shot, crumpled on the sidewalk.

The driver of the black sedan groaned, clutched at his left side, lost control. The big car careened crazily, struck a lamp-post,—a water-plug,—crashed over on its side. Down the street a patrolman heard the shots, saw the car go over, ran forward.

He found the three men trapped in the wrecked machine, and he let them wait, hurrying to the figure on the sidewalk. From the opposite direction another patrolman appeared. They turned the figure over.

Zach Thompson was dead.

Both patrolmen recognized him, at once, from his pictures, as the material witness who wouldn't talk. The first patrolman turned, hurried into the Rose Gardens. The second patrolman began to search the dead man's pockets.

When the first patrolman came back, the other one held out something in his hand. The first patrolman looked at it, took it in his own hand. It was a Congressional Medal of Honor.

The patrolman leaned over the man on the sidewalk. . . . On Zach Thompson's breast he laid the medal.

Breakers Ahead!

By FREDERICK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by George Avison



THE letter was becoming yellowed with time; it had been in Larry Hall's sea-chest for more than three years.

"Dear Sir," it ran.

"If you are Lawrence Hall, the son of Thomas Hall, who formerly lived some fifty miles down the coast from Monterey, you will find it to your advantage to answer this, or call in person at my office."

*"Very truly yours,
A. L. Barton."*

And at the head of the page was engraved the signer's name together with the legend, "*Counselor at Law, Monterey, California.*"

Three years in his sea-chest; and three times Larry Hall had read it, every time with the intention to answer it. Once in the dingy saloon of Three-fingered Jack, hard by the San Francisco water front, where he had found it waiting for him among many other fly-specked letters in a wire rack behind the bar, on his return from a whaling cruise beyond the Bering straits. Within the half-hour after he had opened the envelope,—while he was still warmed with the project of setting forth to make his reply in person,—he walked into the swinging doors of the Bells of Shandon just in time to get the knife which a Portuguese cod-fisherman had flung at a tallow-faced crimp's runner, and when they let him out of the hospital, it was a case of go to sea or go hungry. Again in Shanghai he came upon the paper; and it was in his mind to look into the matter, for his ship was sailing for the Golden Gate with the morning tide. He remembered it this time until the mid-Pacific, when the vessel caught fire; and after that, the project of living became too important; and the letter vanished from his mind long before a lime-juicer tramp took him and his shipmates—and the brass-studded sea-chest—off the hot deck of the foundering hulk and carried them

back to the other side of the world. The third reading took place in a Hoboken rooming-house; and when he thought upon it, he always blamed it for the hurricane that left his ship dismasted in the Caribbean some weeks later on.

There is plenty in the sea to make a man's fancy tend toward superstitions; and Larry was wondering, this afternoon, what fate was going to do to him now. For he was back in San Francisco, and when he was overhauling his sea-chest



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Desperate adventures afloat and ashore come to a young ship-captain after he reads the letter in his sea-chest. . . . By the distinguished author of "Sindbad of Oakland Creek," and "Youth Rides Victorious."

that morning, he had chanced upon the letter.

Before he realized what he was about, he had read it through again. And as he left his shabby room in the shabby bay-windowed flat on Octavia Street, the desire for the seaward hills below the bay of Monterey was eating at his heart—the tawny hills that rose in the warm sunshine, with groves of dark live oaks spattering their windy summits, two thousand feet above the white line of the breakers on the granite headlands. His father had told him of them when he was a little boy on the bleak north coast five hundred miles away; and after his father had died, when Larry was a strapping lad just grown into his manhood, he had seen them twice from the decks of passing vessels. It was that nostalgia—and the queer feeling that went with it, the luring idea of adventure which always took possession of him

The man behind the table looked at Larry.
"You will keep still,
maybe, if I pay you?"



when he thought of the neighborhood—it was these, more than the hint of material advantage, which made him want to go and seek out the writer of the letter today—as they had made him wish for that before. But with the wish there came the premonition born of those harsh sequels to the other readings, and Larry frowned as he started down the cobblestoned streets.

"I wonder what trouble is in the wind today?" he asked himself.

He shrugged his shoulders, and answered his own thought.

"Three times it's brought bad luck. Like as not, the fourth will bring a change. And there's one thing dead sure: any turn is bound to be for the better now. It can't be worse."

Which was possible enough, for he was, as the saying has it, "on the beach," and had been for three months—holding his master's papers but unable to ship even as second mate on the dirtiest tramp that rubbed her rusted plates against the piling in the slips along the city front. For men were plenty and ships were not; and those needing officers could choose from a score of applicants for every berth.

Two dollars in his pocket, and the room-rent due. Ahead of him the same old round that he had traveled every day for many weeks: dim offices in streets that smelled of oakum and tidal mud; groups of sunburned men, young fellows like himself and grizzled old fellows with faces the color of mahogany from the sun and wind of the Seven Seas, all waiting for a chance to go down to the salt water again; and for every one the same terse answer given in the same words at every place:

"Nothing in sight."

Still, all a man can do is try, and a man must keep forever doing that. And the carelessness born of the open sea whose ways are never ordered—the same carelessness that had sent the wages of many a voyage spinning away in odd nooks and corners of the world—held him serene as to the future. He walked with a slight swaying of the body, after the manner of his craft, and he looked bigger than he was, here in the close-walled streets—although for the matter of that he was large enough, wide-shouldered, and near six feet, with the stain of the weather on his young cheeks, and the blue and pink of tattooed serpents and flags and mermaids peeping forth at his opened shirt-front and below his

wristbands. Black hair and high color and bold good-natured eyes; he would have been decked out just right with a bright-colored handkerchief about his head and a knife at his waist-band, instead of the dark blue which he was wearing.

A good long walk from Octavia Street to the narrow thoroughfares down near the harborside; and a long weary walk after that for the length of the city front. But the bold eyes remained undismayed, and the belligerent freshness of his appearance remained untamed by the quiet finality of the repeated "Nothing today." His voice boomed with the same quarter-deck assertiveness at the last office as at the first. And when he found himself on Meiggs wharf at the north end of the city, he might have been down-hearted, but his head was up, his shoulders back; you would have thought, if you had seen him, that he was on the eve of some large project—as indeed he was, though he did not know it.

THE afternoon was well along and the wharf was pretty much deserted; Larry was standing near the outer end gazing over the western reaches of the harbor toward the headlands of the Golden Gate—the hill-lined stretch of waters where the varied pageant of the ships from all the Seven Seas is passing every day—when he heard a voice behind him.

"They're coming now," it said. He looked around, but there was no one in sight. The sound of rapid footsteps came from behind a tall pile of baled jute; there must have been three of them, so he judged. He would have seen them a moment later, emerging from their hiding-place, if he had remained as he was; but he had turned away by that time to learn whose approach it was that the voice announced.

The slow, regular thump of oars told him where to look. A three-masted schooner lay at anchor in the stream; and even with the bareness of her poles, which always gives a fore-and-after a starved leanness of appearance, she showed an appealing beauty of line. Like all men who follow the sea by their own desire, he was as susceptible to alluring ships as if they were beautiful women; and he had noticed this one today. The *Katherine* was her name. The boat was coming from her.

A pair of sailors were pulling at the oars, and there were two passengers.

One was sitting in the sternsheets, erect and lean and rigid, with the visored cap of a ship's officer pulled down over his eyes to shade them from the late sun. Even a landsman would have known him for the skipper of some sailing craft. Quarterdeck and long warfare with the hostile sea; the faded neatness of small pay for large deeds and endless responsibility—these were written all over him. The other passenger was more unusual. A fat Chinese, in jade green silken blouse and brocaded trousers of old rose, with a round green cap of quilted silk, from the crown of which a tassel hung; he was sitting with his plump hands folded across his extensive stomach; his saffron face was as placid as a summer's moon.

So these were the ones of whom that stealthy voice had spoken. Larry whirled on his heel to seek the voice's owner. But he and his companions had vanished. The small-boat came alongside the float; the passengers climbed to the wharf, and a moment later Larry heard the man in the officer's cap saying:

"If you ask me, that bunch of thugs up for'ard know it's gold—"

Then they were gone by; and the words became indistinguishable. They passed up the quiet street, in the slanting yellow sunlight; the skipper rolling slightly after the manner of his kind; the Chinese walking like a duck, his hands still folded over his wide waist. And shortly afterward Larry departed for his room.

Now a man, when he is young and lusty and fond of the strong meat of action, can stand just so much of drabness and no more; and in these dull months of idleness it was Larry's habit to seek what relaxation he could find of evenings, without having to part with any of his fast-dwindling savings. Which is one reason for his being on the Barbary Coast, a few hours after that queerly assorted pair had vanished from his sight. Another reason was his friendship with old Louis Gomez, a friendship that dated back to the time when the two of them had been whaler's mates on the old *John and Winthrop* up in the Arctic. At present Louis owned the All Nations dance-hall, where there was neither color-line nor racial prejudice. And as the evening wore on, Larry drifted hither.

IN the All Nations you drank or frolicked or fought according to your disposition; no matter how wild the frolic or how fierce the fight, the accordeons

never ceased their droning. They were going full blast, all three of them, and the dance-floor was crowded with dusky Cape Verde Islanders, with black-haired men from the Azores, with Scandinavians and with women from the Lord knows what far corners of the earth; the bar was fronted with an ever-changing, never-ending line of drinkers. The swish of the big mugs sliding across the polished mahogany, and the staccato peal of the cash-register bell mingled with the music and the Babel of many tongues. Larry was standing at the inner end of the counter talking with the grizzled proprietor, and he was about to take his departure, when the swinging doors opened. The tall spare man in officer's blue and the fat Chinese crossed the threshold.

"Excuse me," Louis Gomez said. "I got business with these two." He turned away to greet them, and Larry went on out. He was standing on the sidewalk's edge before the door, watching the crowd across the street, who had gathered to listen to the barker of a dubious dime museum, when the pair came forth again. They passed within arm's-length. The tall man was carrying a canvas sack—a small sack, but the sag of the bearer's shoulder betrayed its weight.

"If you ask me, that bunch of thugs up for'ard know it's gold." The words came back to Larry's mind. It might have been the contents of this same sack that the speaker meant. So he was thinking when he started homeward a moment or two later.

The sidewalk crowd was thick: sailors and pickpockets and lumber-jacks, and women with the paint in startling patches on their cheeks. He climbed the hill to Dupont Street, where a cross-current was moving by,—yellow men in loose black garments and with long queues hanging down their backs,—where the boom of gongs and the squeal of Chinese flutes came from hidden upstairs rooms, and the sudden sweetish heavy tang of opium smoke reached his nostrils through a hundred other exotic odors. And he saw that queer pair a little way ahead of him.

The fat Chinese was padding slowly, and although only his back was visible, it was plain from his attitude that he was still holding his plump hands folded upon his rounded stomach. By the time Larry gained the opposite curb, they were nearly half a block away, and at the second corner they were still in sight, turning off Dupont up the hill.

Just why he made that same turning, keeping in their wake, Larry never knew. It might have been the curiosity roused by what he had overheard that afternoon; it might have been some more subtle instinct; it might have been mere luck. At any rate, he did it.

Here on the steep hill the lights were few, and there were long spaces where it seemed quite dark by contrast to the glare from which he had passed. The two of them showed dimly in the gloom; he saw them turn into an alleyway.

A moment later Larry heard a strangled cry. And after that the scuffle of feet, and the dull thud of blows.

While he was running toward the spot, the thought crossed his mind, swiftly as thoughts will in such moments of stress, how he had been looking at that old letter in his sea-chest this morning—and how things had worked out as usual.

CHAPTER II

A FIGHT—AND A BAG OF GOLD

IT was one of those sudden transitions from dimness to deeper gloom which leave a man half-blinded for the first few moments. And Larry dived into the alley on the run.

The buildings rose on either side with scarcely twenty feet between; a single light showed high on one of the blue-black walls, a little streak of yellow leaking around the edge of a drawn shade; and that was all. The air was thick with smells: odors of incense smoke, the reek of decaying vegetables, and the warm effluvia of boiling fat. The thin squealing of a Chinese flute came from somewhere far overhead—and here before him the ugly noises of men fighting for their lives.

They were in a tight huddle: swaying bodies and twisted limbs, a group of struggling forms that looked like one huge sable shape—a shape that changed with bewildering swiftness, shifting its ground with a scuffle of feet and the dull impact of fists on bare flesh. And all at once, while Larry was coming on, it dissolved. The fat Chinese shot forth as if he were a missile that had been thrown and had failed to reach its mark. There was a fluttering of loose garments as he soared through the air; he landed on the cobblestones with a thump, and Larry leaped over him.

His eyes were already becoming more accustomed to the darkness; and he was

able to pick out the lank skipper looming a good head above three others—grotesque silhouettes of black. They were closing in upon him. His long arm went out like a whiplash and one of the silhouettes doubled up like a folded jack-knife; there was a windy sigh, and the man pitched forward on his face.

The other two dived for their victim, heads low and arms outstretched; one of them gripped him round the knees—and then Larry was upon them.

No time for fair fighting now; and in the rough school where Larry had learned the art of self-defense, the punctilios of the prize-ring had never been regarded. The skipper and his assailant crashed to the cobblestones. The third man was whirling to meet the newcomer. Larry halted, poised on one heel; the other foot shot out and caught the thug in the midsection.

The lank seafarer had shaken off his enemy and was getting to his feet. But the man whom he had knocked down a few seconds ago had staggered up, and now leaped astride his back.

So the attacker showed, during a fleeting space of time, as if his victim were a horse and he the rider; then his arm flew upward; there was a faint glitter in the darkness as the arm descended; and the crunching sound of bare steel driven through flesh and bone.

Larry was leaping toward him, his fingers about to close upon the fellow's throat, when he tripped and went upon his knees.

He heard a door slam and the thin pealing of a police whistle. Then a voice called out close by.

"Belay," it said.

He gained his feet. The tall skipper was lying on his face, and the fat Chinese was standing by the building wall. The three thugs were gone.

Larry glanced down and saw what had tripped him. It was the canvas bag which the seafaring man had carried when he came from the All Nations dance-hall. The Chinese came from the wall; he bent and picked up the sack. Voices sounded in the darkness of the alley, and a window rasped as some one raised it far above their heads. The wounded man moaned.

"We got to get a doctor," Larry said.

Instead of answering him, the other called out, something in his own tongue; there was a noise of banging doors; a gush of yellow light flowed across the threshold; and half a dozen yellow men

in loose black blouses and flowing trousers appeared within its path. The fat Chinese spoke again; they picked up the wounded man and bore him away into the doorway. The fat man nodded.

"I think you better come along," he said. And Larry went beside him.

THE door slammed behind them. A single gas-light flickered beside the plastered wall. They were in a narrow passageway, with a steep flight of stairs before them, up which the six sable-clad men were bearing their inert burden. These reached the landing above, and they passed within a door.

The fat man sighed and changed the canvas sack to the other hand. The two of them started up the stairs—one flight and then another, and at the head of the third they found themselves before a door with many panels, all tooled out in fantastic patterns and painted a bright vermilion. The Chinese knocked; the door swung open, and they crossed the threshold. A long room, its sides hung with heavy silks, green silks and peacock blue embroidered with huge figures of dragons worked out in threads of gold. At the farther end there was a shrine, where joss-sticks burned, and little heaps of incense; but the thin bluish spirals of smoke that united in a faint cloud overhead were smothered by the weight of the perfume from a wide bank of potted hyacinths which fronted the shrine's bannered silks.

Just within the door which they had entered, standing one on either side, were two lank Chinese in loose-sleeved black blouses and wide trousers, and wearing the wide-rimmed black hats which marked the hired gunmen of the tongs.

Midway down the room near one side there was a wide table of dark teakwood strewn with papers like the desk of some executive in a down-town office-building; and behind it a man was sitting. His garb was that of an American; carefully creased trousers, a wasp-waisted coat and a handkerchief peeping out of its pocket; but his face was saffron, and a plaited queue was coiled atop his shaven head. The fat man shuffled to the table, and there was a chinking sound as he laid the canvas bag upon it. The two talked in their own language at some length. When they had done, the man behind the table looked slowly at Larry.

"Much obliged," he said. "You will keep still, maybe, if I pay you?"

The answer was on the tip of Larry's



As Larry looked, the form doubled and pitched forward; there came the sound of a splash. Larry's shout broke the quiet of the decks: "Man overboard!"

tongue, as direct as it was impolite; for there was something in the quiet sureness with which this yellow man spoke that roused his anger—the sureness that he could be bribed to silence. If they had asked it as a favor, it would have been different; for to his way of thinking, the damage had been done; the men who committed the crime had vanished, and now the police would only mean trouble for all hands. But this idea of buying, and the manner of its proposal—

THEN, as he was opening his lips to say the words, an idea occurred to him. No doubt of it: that wounded man was the skipper of the schooner whose pretty lines had so intrigued him; and when she sailed, he would not be with her. He swallowed his defiance, for here lay opportunity before him. He came across the room to the wide table.

"The way it looks to me," he said, "you need a captain for your schooner. And I'd like the berth."

The yellow face across the table remained unchanged.

"How do you know so much?" its owner asked.

Then Larry told them what he had overheard that afternoon, and of the encounter in the All Nations dance-hall. And then, after the two Chinese had talked together in their lilting singsong for a good five minutes, Larry interrupted to suggest:

"You send a man to Louis Gomez and ask him about me—whether you can trust me."

The man behind the table whispered to his companion, and the latter shuffled from the room, holding his plump hands folded across his extensive stomach; and when he had gone—"You take a chair, please," the other said.

Larry complied; the minutes dragged by; the Chinese remained motionless, and sat there looking straight ahead of him under his heavy lids, a slight smile upon his lips—the cold wise smile of one who is always well pleased with himself.

The minutes dragged on by, and Larry was thinking: "Supposing Louis Gomez isn't in? Or supposing the fat man hasn't gone to him at all?" You never could tell about a Chinese—what was in his mind. More than one stranger had disappeared here in the quarter, never to be heard of again. And he evidently knew more than they wanted him to know. . . .

A knock broke the room's stillness. The fat Chinese came in, his face the same bland mask as ever. He stood before the table, and he spoke at some length. The other reached for a lacquered oblong box, opened it and shoved it across the table toward Larry.

"Have a cigar," he said. And while Larry was lighting his match, he became conscious that a certain tension in the room had relaxed.

The man behind the table spoke again. "I think maybe," he said, "you are a good man. You can keep your mouth shut and do what you are told?"

"I can follow orders, if that's what you mean," Larry replied. . . .

They talked the matter over at some length, and when Larry departed, he was signed as captain of the schooner *Katherine*, bound for Ensenada with mixed cargo, thence to sail up the coast in ballast to a destination that he would learn in the Mexican port. And there was in his mind the well-defined suspicion that this ballast was of a nature which would not stand inspection by the Customs officers, that this unknown destination was one of those out-of-the-way coves where smugglers landed their contraband.

The fog was coming in when he walked down the narrow sidewalk of Dupont Street, and the lights glowed large and blurred through the drifting wreaths; shuffling figures passed him, figures of yellow men in black wide trousers tied at the ankles, men with oblique eyes whose queues hung down their backs. The booming of joss-house gongs and the squealing of Chinese flutes came from upstairs rooms. The air was full of strange exotic odors.

He was not noticing these things about him. He was too busy thinking of that ballast and of the orders which he was to get at Ensenada. Not that these things disturbed him deeply—for he was young and he was reckless, and all these matters lay in the future. He shrugged his wide shoulders—time to deal with them when they rose to face him. As for the present—he was going down to the sea again!

CHAPTER III

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

A WINDY morning, and the seas ran green with flecks of white along their crests, when the *Katherine* took her departure from the red lightship off the

bar. Riley, the first mate, was mustering the crew on the main deck—a big-boned man with the mild voice that so many hard drivers own. The hands were gathered before him; most of them were coatless, with their flimsy shirts afutter in the fresh breeze; and some had tumbled up bareheaded at the call.

Larry looked down upon them from the break of the poop. They raised their eyes, now one and now another, to take their brief regard of him; and when it met his steady gaze, every pair of eyes shifted and studied the deck as if the gleaming planks held something of great interest to him. There was, however, one exception:

A swarthy Greek, with sleek black hair and eyes of jet, he stood between two others whose bullet heads and the unhealthy pallor of their faces held more suggestion of jail than of forecastle. In contrast to them, but plainly he was on close terms with them; there was that in their attitudes to show that these three hung together, and that the dark man was their leader. And when this one glanced up, his shallow black eyes remained upon the skipper's for a moment. They lowered finally with a slow drooping of the lids, as insolent as the gaze that had preceded it.

"If there's trouble with that bunch," Larry told himself, "the Greek is the man I've got to handle."

BUT there was no trouble on the run down the coast. And although these three were keeping together, always to be found in each other's company, there was never so much as a word from them, or from any other member of the crew, to which exception could be taken. By the time the schooner made Ensenada Larry was beginning to think less upon those words which he had heard his predecessor saying that afternoon on Meigs wharf. The hands might be a bunch of thugs—but they had shown themselves good seamen.

He said as much to the first mate one night. He had come down into the cabin to find Riley seated at the table, sprawled over the log-book.

"Good seamen, yes." Riley was chewing a splinter of pine wood, a habit he had; and he removed it from his lips as if it were a cigar, holding it between his fingers while he went on: "I ort to know. I been with 'em three v'yses now. But I don't like the way they're acting. Before, it was always trouble.

Today a bit of lip, and tomorrow a, 'Go to hell.' And you're up against it in this business, when your foremast hands knows enough to send owners and officers to jail, if they got the notion to talk."

"I've not heard any back-talk," Larry said.

"I'd like it better if you had and if I had," the first mate grumbled. "Bad crews is like bad weather. Always quiet when the glass is fallin'. I bet something busts soon." He replaced the bit of wood between his teeth and went on finishing the entry in the log-book.

SEVERAL nights later the *Katherine* lay in the roadstead off Ensenada, with the lights of the little town asprawl upon the first rise of land before her, and the loom of the bare gaunt hills of Baja California rising behind it to the cloudless sky. The cargo had been discharged, and on that evening the ballast with which she was to sail back northward came on board.

It came through the darkness in small-boats, whose oars made hardly a sound; and the men who manned them never spoke above a whisper—boats that stole alongside without a light to betray their presence. And it went over the rail—one piece of ballast at a time—a succession of black shadows which thumped softly to the deck and shuffled inboard to the open hatchway.

There they were swallowed, each in its turn, in the same tense silence and the same haste as they had come. But now and again, at this last moment before it disappeared into the blackness of the hold, one of those sable forms gave forth a low sound—a stifled exclamation that lilted strangely on the ears of those who heard. Twice it happened that some one up forward struck a match to light his pipe; and the flare gave a brief glimpse of flimsy garments fluttering in the night breeze that swept the roadstead, a glimpse of long queues dangling, and of saffron faces whose slanting eyes glowed for the instant reflecting the wavering light, then with the dying of the little flame became again invisible. And when the last Chinese was stowed away and the hatch was lowered over them, a lank man in soiled flannels and a Panama hat which had seen better days came aboard. He laid two plump canvas bags—one large, one small—upon the table, and tarried a few moments in the cabin with the skipper.

"Eighty-six head," he said; "and when you've landed 'em, go ashore to check up on the tally. The big house on the hill. You can't miss it. You'll pay the money there, ten dollars a head, for taking 'em inland. But make your go up to the house as soon as the last Chink's safely on the beach. Saves the chance of a dispute, you understand; and this party's not above saying we held out on him, Cap'n."

"The big house on the hill," Larry nodded. "And who do I ask for?"

"That's so. I'd forgot, your first trip, Cap'n. The name is Hall. And they tell me he's hard as nails. Don't let him slip one over on you, when it comes to the count. He'll do it if he can. Bradley Hall."

"The big house on the hill," Larry repeated, "and the name is Bradley Hall. All right. And what's our destination?"

"Trinidad Head," the other told him. "You'll find it on the chart—and the course marked out in pencil, with the bearings. It lies below the Bay of Monterey—some forty miles or so."

THE clank of the windlass warned Larry it was time to leave; he hastened to the deck. And he stood in the cabin with those last words as food for his thoughts. Forty miles down the coast from Monterey; and the man's name was Hall. But the name might mean nothing. For he had never heard his father speak of any relative. That stuck in his mind, however, that same failure to mention any kin. Now that he thought upon it, he recalled a certain hardness that had come into his father's eyes at times when he was talking of these things—as if perhaps he had been keeping silence, and as if the secret had a bitter flavor. . . .

Larry stowed the bags of gold in his stateroom. He was sitting in the cabin an hour later, speculating as to the strangeness of the luck that had at last turned his wanderings to that spot, wondering what complications might lie ahead of him. While he was thus engrossed, the first mate came down the stairs and seated himself on the locker, pulling off his seaboots. For the watch had changed, and Hansen, the blocky second mate, was in charge on deck.

"Me," Riley announced, "I'm going to turn in." He suited action to the word, and when he had gone to his bunk and pulled the blankets about him, Larry realized it was time he was getting some

sleep himself. It was with the idea of clearing his mind from the thoughts that were racing through it, that he went up the companionway to take a turn about the deck.

The night was clear, and as yet there was no moon. The stars blazed in the sky, leaving faint streaks of brightness on the flanks of the tossing swells. The air was freshening; the schooner was heeling gently, with a swish of rushing water sounding now and then under the lee rail. The man at the wheel stood wide-footed, with the coal of his pipe glowing to mark his place. Larry paced back and forth across the quarterdeck. A glow of light showed up forward, spreading from the forecastle scuttle and revealing the blocky form of the second mate. He was standing bent forward a little, gazing into the forecastle, as if perhaps something down there had attracted his attention. So he remained while Larry took his second turn across the deck. Then he was gone.

It was the ever-present thought of trouble that made Larry leave his place here in the after-parts of the schooner and start forward; and because of that same idea he kept to the darker places as much as possible. So he went on, and he had reached the mainmast when he discovered that Hansen had not gone below,—as he had first believed to be the case,—but was now standing on the rail holding with one hand to the main rigging. He was standing as he had been a few moments before, bent forward, as if he were searching the darkness for something. His thick form showed, a black silhouette against the gray of the surrounding darkness. And then, as Larry looked, the silhouette collapsed.

It doubled and pitched forward. The hands flew up. The dim form showed for an instant poised in the air between the sky and the sea's vague mystery. Then there came the sound of a splash. Larry's shout broke the quiet of the decks.

"*Man overboard!*" He bellowed an order to the helmsman for the shifting of the wheel which would bring the schooner up into the wind. And before this last was fairly off his lips, he called: "*All hands!*"

The crew came tumbling to the deck. The schooner rounded to, and the men leaped to the skids; the boat went over-side, with Larry sitting in the stern-sheets. The long swells held no sign of the one whom they sought. And this



seemed strange, for the second mate was a good swimmer. There was some mystery behind it: the manner of his going overside, as if some one had struck him down, his sinking like a plummet. But no man had been near him at the time.

The boat came back at last, and the *Katherine* got under way. Larry talked it over with Riley in the cabin:

"I can't help thinking that I overlooked something," he growled, "and it's left me with a nasty feeling."

"Lucky you was on deck," Riley replied, "or we'd never 'a' knowed what happened. Going to make an investigation?"

Larry was silent for some moments, and then he shook his head.

"If there's been a murder, all it would do is make the man who did it know we've got suspicions. Better let 'em think we're in the dark."

And Riley agreed. . . .

While the two of them were talking, another conference was going on up forward. The men off watch had come below; and of these six, three had already turned in. The sound of their heavy breathing announced that they were asleep. The lantern in the fore-castle burned dim, swinging lazily against the vessel's slow roll. The three hands who were awake were sitting on the edge of a lower bunk—two men with close-cropped bullet heads, and their black-haired leader sitting between them. The faces were so near together that they almost touched, and the Greek was speaking in a whisper.

"That's one," he was saying. "And if we whittle 'em down any further, somebody's going to get wise to what is on."

"I got a look at the skipper's face." The speaker was the smaller of the bullet headed pair; his faded eyes were moving constantly, as if he were always fear-

ful of some one coming up behind him. "It was when he come back in the boat. I'll take my oath, he thinks there's something in the wind."

"Let him worry." The Greek laughed quietly. "He didn't hear you fellows when you sung out and drewed that squarehead up forward—and he didn't see me up in the cross-trees. Lucky that belayin'-pin I dropped on him went on overside after it hit. And now you two stand by, till I give the word. Then we'll 'tend to the skipper."

"When do you look for that?" the larger of his companions asked.

"When we've landed these Chinks at Trinidad Head and put to sea again. And now there's two hands left that we aint dead sure of—them two Norwegians in the watch on deck. They have got to be sounded out before we make any more moves."

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE LANDFALL

IT was some time past the middle of the afternoon, a week later, when they sighted Trinidad Head: tall granite ramparts fronting the restless sea; the glasses revealed the twisted shapes of cypresses and their gnarled roots clinging to the promontory's crest, and the ever-changing ranks of surf assaulting the rocks below; behind the cape the steep coast range rising a good two thousand feet, and leading to the summit here, a winding road scarring the mountain's flank—now vanishing behind a ridge, now reappearing from the depths of a ravine. And where its head attained the rigid skyline stood a huge house of white stone.

Its windows glowed like living fire in the rays of the lowering sun; its blanched walls gleamed like snow. Larry gazed

at it from the *Katherine's* quarterdeck; if he had never heard of it before, it would have held his eyes. There was something about it, there on the heights, between the clear sky and the wide reaches of the heaving sea, something in its gaunt white walls and ugly turrets, that seemed to him forbidding. And he was thinking, as he looked, that if he were a traveler by land and seeking shelter for the night, he would choose the most ramshackle cabin down in the lowlands in preference to it.

The sun slipped downward on its long arc toward the west. They worked the schooner in to her anchorage; the headland seemed to change its shape as they came on, and the coastline to unfold with their approach, disclosing now another and a lower cape, topped with dark evergreens to the northwest, and now, between these two jutting points, a crescent-shaped beach of white sand fronting a shallow bay. And finally, when the *Katherine* reached the mooring-ground, the landward flanks of Trinidad Head opened to show the placid blue waters of a little cove, with a flimsy wharf, and a spidery tramway, whose skeleton stanchions and the black steel cable with its metal buckets traveled inland to vanish in the somber depths of a redwood cañon. It extended, so Riley told Larry, to a number of lime-kilns somewhere back among the hills. The whole place was silent; no movement showed; the buckets hung still on the dead cable. The sun went down; the windows of the great stone house became dead, but the walls gleamed faintly on the mountain-top.

The roar of the cable broke the stillness as the anchor went overside. And presently the first mate stepped up beside the skipper, chewing his inevitable splinter. He nodded toward the hatch.

"Be rid of those Chinks soon," he said, "and the crowd that's gettin' rich out of this won't be any gladder to see their passage-money than I'll be to see the last pigtail going over the rail."

DARKNESS crept up out of the sea. The windows of the house on the mountain glared with the light of lamps within. And now the little bay awakened with the night. The sound of voices came across the water, and a lantern gleamed upon the flimsy wharf. The *Katherine's* boats were lowered; the hatch was raised. The *pad-pad* of slipping feet upon the deck, the faint

thumping of the oars; and the ballast departed as silently as it had come aboard. The rasping of the wheels by which the huge buckets rode the tramway cables drifted out from shore on the warm night breeze.

"Last boatload's gone," Riley reported. "And they're riding, two to a bucket, on their way to the lime-kilns now. Before sunup, they'll be stowed away in freight-cars on some siding over in the Salinas Valley." He pointed to the rows of windows glowing on the mountain-top. "You'll be expected up there pretty soon."

Larry turned, to look about the vacant deck.

"Makes a man feel cleaner to be rid of 'em," he said, and then he stood for some moments gazing at those lighted windows. "What kind of fellow is this man that I'm to call on, anyhow?"

"Meanin' your namesake?" Riley shook his head. "Search me. I never laid eyes on him. All I know is he's rich—lands and cattle and money in the bank—yet he'll be sitting up late tonight to get ten dollars a head for those Chinks going inland on his tramway. Mebbe," he added dryly, "you can figger him out from that."

THE sound of oars announced the boat's approach; Larry went below to get the money. When he had returned to the rail with the smaller canvas sack of gold-pieces, the yawl was waiting alongside. He went down the man-ropes and took his place in the sternsheets; the two seamen shoved off; and while they were pulling to the beach, Larry sat there facing them. But he was not paying any heed to them; his eyes were on those lighted windows far above; and he was thinking how strange it was: the manner of his coming to the country of which that faded letter in his sea-chest had spoken—of that, and of the man who bore the same name that he did. So he failed to see the faces of the oarsmen in the lantern-light; and how the nearer of them could not keep his eyes from the little canvas bag between his feet.

The boat shot through the low surf and grounded on the beach, and Larry stepped ashore with the sack in his hand. The two seamen stood looking after him.

"Nigh to a thousand dollars in that bag," one said, "and we could—"

The other gripped him by the elbow; it was the Greek.

"More'n ten times as much in the cab-

in. And in four days we sail. Remember that, my friend," he whispered. "You can wait four days, I guess."

At the end of the beach under the first rocks of the long headland there was a great fire of driftwood, and the forms of men showed in the ruddy light of the flames; some one was singing an old chantey. His voice came, a clear ringing baritone:

"The work was hard. The voyage was long."

Then the bass voices of his companions in the refrain:

"Leave her, Johnny, leave her."

The next stave followed:

"Tomorrow you will get your pay."

The others came in with a roar:

"It's time for us to leave her."

The moon was climbing the lofty inland ridges. The winding road came into sight beyond the edge of the dunes, plunging into a cañon where tall redwoods stood in black ranks. The voice of the singer followed Larry as he vanished in the wood; he heard some one laughing back there. And there was that in the sound of the laughter which he did not like. . . .

The huge redwoods towered on both sides of the road, and their branches made a thick roof overhead, shutting out the faint moonlight; it was so dark that Larry had to feel his way. Presently the road which he was following turned abruptly, climbing the hill's flank; he passed above the great evergreens, and now he looked down upon their tops; tan-oaks grew here, with patches of open land that gleamed palely between them; and the way was getting steeper. He came out of the oaks into the chaparral. Where he had been a few moments ago, the air was damp and still; up here he felt the dryness where rocks and earth had been baking in the sun all day long, and he smelled the keen acrid odor of sage. So he climbed on, following the road's wide loops until he reached the summit, and saw the long coastline far beneath him, with the white fringe of restless surf in the moonlight, and the open sea beyond.

WHERE Larry had halted, the road clung to the mountain-side; a few yards ahead of him it turned abruptly, doubling back along the summit to the tall house of white stone. And just at the apex of the sharp angle, where the land fell away steeply to the water on two sides beneath it, there was a solitary

tree; at its roots a heap of large white boulders formed a rude semicircle behind a placid spring. When Larry paused, he was conscious of something moving there.

He was still for some moments, watching the spot, feeling in a queer way the presence of those rows of glaring windows farther back on the summit of the hill as if they were live eyes,—and hostile,—watching him. Then a figure came into sight from the shadow of the tree, and stood beside the pool: a girl, bare-headed, and her hair glowed where the moonlight touched its ends.

HE got a glimpse of her face; afterward, when he had come to know the face better, he often thought of that first look; and he was sure then that he had seen the blue eyes in this moment, the blue eyes and the milky whiteness of the skin, and the mass of dark red hair whose curls were never the same—always in disorder, and in their rebellion against arrangement, always beautiful. Probably he was wrong in that belief, for it was only for a moment that the look lasted, and then her back was toward him. She was standing there looking down upon the sea; and the roaring of the sailors' voices came faintly up to her from the distant beach where the fire glowed. It seemed to him that there was something in her attitude that spoke of loneliness—of loneliness and of longing.

He did not know just what it was that took his eyes from her. It might have been a sound off there on the hilltop that he had caught; it might have been her own sudden movement—for she turned at the same moment that he did, and she uttered a single outcry.

The road to the house lay straight and wide, ashine in the moonlight. And a great dog was coming down it. It did not need her cry of fear, to tell the danger she was in. There was a savage eagerness in the brute, a swift tense ferocity that turned Larry cold. A brindle dog—some sort of cross-breed, perhaps Great Dane and savage malemute. It ran in silence, and its tawny flanks shone like dull gold streaked with brown; its eyes gleamed red in the moonlight. Higher than a tall man's waist, with cropped ears, and the ripple of the muscles showed under the close satiny coat; its jaws were parted, and the teeth shone in startling contrast to the red cavern of a mouth.



THE two tangents of the road met at the spring where the girl was standing; and the angle was so sharp that there were only a few yards of hillside between these where Larry stood. He started running up the slope, in the hope of gaining the upper leg in time to intercept the animal. But the land lay steep, and the going was rough; the thorny stems of the chaparral reached out and caught his limbs, and he crashed through a patch of brittle brush, on hands and knees, just as the great dog went on by. It passed so close that his outstretched fingers almost touched it; but it was intent on this other victim, and did not even turn its head.

For the first moment after the girl had seen it, she had remained as if frozen to the spot. Then she turned to the heap of rocks; the tallest of them rose twice a man's height, with the others clustered about its foot. She sprang upon this pedestal, seized the rough flank of the largest boulder, and dragged herself on up; she was crouching there near to the summit when the great beast shot past Larry.

It rushed on through the moonlight without a sound save the soft padding of its feet upon the roadway, with head outstretched and the big jaws parted.

The girl's fingers were slipping, and she was beginning to fall, when it leaped for her.

It was a mighty leap; the tawny body with streaks of golden yellow left the earth a good six feet and more. But it was overeager; and the very fact that she was falling, saved her then. For she had slid down the face of the rock to one side, and the brute swept by her, missing her by inches—missing her so narrowly that the snapping jaws tore a shred from her dress, leaving a red weal upon the soft flesh of her shoulder. The animal struck the rock to which she clung, and it bounded off, crashing into the brush beside the spring.

And before it was up again, Larry reached the pool. The great beast saw him then, wheeled to face him; and in the same deadly silence as it had come, it leaped for his throat. He held the downhill side; and he lunged forward as it sprang. It was as if the two of them were imbued with the same purpose—to come to grips. But the ugly desire that drove the brute was blind, and the man was thinking coolly. Its single idea was to kill; and he had two lives depending on him. He had fought many times before, and some of them had been fierce battles, where the odds were strong against him. Always, when the work was growing hot and swift, he had felt a cold eagerness, a joy of clear vision, where every little detail of the action was sharply outlined. That feeling had never been so strong upon him as it was now.

There had been no time for seeking any sort of weapon; he had his bare hands, and that was all. And he would need all the wits he owned to make them serve him.

So he was fighting on the defensive, waiting for his opportunity to come from what the other did; and when he saw the brute make that spring, he dived toward it, bending low. He held his eyes upon the tawny streaked body swooping down upon him; then he swerved, throwing his head and shoulders to one side. He could hear the snap of the big teeth, and he could feel the hot breath upon his face; the odor of the dog's breath was in his nostrils, as it shot on by.

AS it fell, Larry straightened and whirled; and just in time! For it was up at once, rushing at him from below. Now there was no chance for dodging. The full weight struck Larry and

The great beast shot past Larry without a sound. The girl's fingers were slipping, and she was beginning to fall when it leaped for her.



he went down. He felt the rip of great teeth upon his arm, and he was struggling with the dog upon him. His foot shot out; the sudden weight that had borne him down went from him for an instant.

There was no time for thought, no time even for seeing; Larry had barely risen to his hands and knees when the animal was closing with him again. He threw one arm before his throat to shield it from those teeth, and as he did so, his fingers touched the slippery neck, its muscles rigid as steel. The fingers slid along the glossy coat; they closed upon something hard and cold—thin links of a metal chain. He gripped them more tightly. And he knew that he had found his opportunity.

His other arm had come before his throat now, and he was putting all his strength into the hand that held the loose chain collar—putting forth all his strength to twist the collar tight. The links bit into his fingers with the increasing pressure. He took another turn, and then another.

The blood was hot from the gash on his arm; he could hear the click of the wolflike teeth before his throat; but he was holding the head away—just far enough, and that was all. He bore his body upward against the weight upon it,

and the teeth snapped again. It might have been that he was mistaken; it seemed to him the sound was fainter this time. . . . Then he knew he had been right.

For he could feel the great body that pressed down upon him growing limp; the jaws relaxed. He tightened his grip still more upon the chain, and he heard the strangling rattle in the thick throat. He took another twist. The brute collapsed, an inert heap. He struggled from under it, and when he finally released his hold, it lay there as if dead.

LARRY got slowly to his feet. The blood was dripping from his arm; and for the moment, he was so weak that he swayed a little as he stood.

Then he saw the girl. She was coming toward him; and her face was white; her lips were parted, and her eyes shone—blue eyes, blue as the flowers of the flax. Her hair was like a mass of spun copper, and where the moonlight touched its ends it glowed like gold. He caught sight of the white flesh, where her dress was rent at the shoulder.

"You're hurt?" He realized how badly beaten out he was himself, when he asked it. She came straight on, and her eyes grew wider as with fear.

"You're bleeding badly." He wondered if that could be feeling for him, that made her voice shake a little. He looked down at his arm.

"Might have been a lot worse," he told her.

"Might have been." She repeated the words with quiet emphasis. "I don't like to think of what it would have been, if you hadn't come." She was beside him now, and she laid her hand upon his arm. The coat-sleeve was torn, and the red gash showed beneath it. His eyes followed hers, and he nodded. He stripped off the coat and dropped on his knees at the edge of the pool. He plunged the arm into the cold water and held it there for some time.

"Not so much of a cut he made, after all," he said, "and it's bleeding free, which is a good thing."

She made no answer. She had turned away and for the moment he thought it was the sight of blood that was making her keep her back toward him. Then he heard the sound of tearing cloth, and she was facing him again, holding a strip of white linen in her hand. She smiled, seeing his look.

"If women only carried handkerchiefs of decent size, I needn't have done it," she said. "Now, hold out your arm." He complied, and she wrapped the bandage about it. And while she was doing this, he was wondering who she was, and whither she had come. From the great house back of them, no doubt, so he was telling himself—when he heard something stirring, and she uttered a low exclamation. He looked around. The great dog was struggling to its feet. The girl had started back. Larry took a step toward the animal. It was standing now, looking up at him, but the eyes were not savage; and as his own eyes met them, the huge head sank lower.

Larry spoke quietly. "Down!"

The brute cringed before him.

"He never did that for any other man," she cried.

Larry shook his head.

"I hope there aren't any more like him. I'd hate to have to tame another one just now."

"They've three others, but this one is the most savage. They've trained him to be, always. He must have got loose somehow," she told him, "for they rarely let them go."

"I suppose," he said, "he comes from the house over there. And you belong there?"

"I—no." She hesitated, and caught her breath; and he thought that he saw a change come into her face. Then she went on swiftly: "No. I'm a guest there." He was conscious of a difference in her manner, as if she had withdrawn into herself. And it was with an effort that he made his own manner indifferent as he said:

"Well, I must be getting on there now." He picked up his coat and put it on.

She stood regarding him in silence.

The night breeze brought the sound of voices to their ears from the beach beneath them—bass voices roaring the refrain of an old sailors' song. She looked down toward the wavering patch of orange where the fire was glowing, far below. And when she turned to him again, all the warmth seemed to have gone from her.

"You came from down there? You belong to that smuggler?" She said it breathlessly, and she drew back as she spoke.

"You mean the schooner?" He had stiffened at her question, and his voice was hard. "Yes, I came from her. I'm her captain, in fact." A sudden flare of hot anger came over him. For though he had known his share of women before, this girl was the first who had ever stirred him, and she had stirred him deeply. But now—he felt the coldness in her voice as if it had been a slap upon his face. So he went on swiftly:

"I'm her captain, and she's a smuggler. But the money that she makes by it doesn't happen to dirty *my* hands. Which makes me remember why I came—to bring some of that money to your host."

He lifted his cap and walked away.

CHAPTER V

THE MASTER OF TRINIDAD HOUSE

LARRY had gone less than half his distance to the house of white stone when he heard the soft padding of feet behind him. He turned and saw the great dog at his heels; and when he glanced around, the brute lowered its head, and stood gazing up into his face; then the tail swung slowly, and the cold nose thrust forward, touching his hand. He stroked the huge muzzle that had been gaping at his throat a few minutes before.

"Well, anyhow, I've got one friend

here," he thought. And as if to show that there was no room for doubt on that point, the animal took a step forward and laid its head against his chest. And when he started on, it hung at heel, keeping pace with him, holding its eyes upon him as if he were a god.

So they came on, the two of them, the man walking slowly. For his heart was bitter, and the weight of the canvas sack which he was carrying was to him as a reminder of the girl's words that had brought the bitterness.

"*You belong to that smuggler?*" The words and the manner of her saying them, the change that had come over her with the discovery; she had drawn back from him, as if she had found of a sudden that he was beneath her.

UP to then he had taken no thought as to the business of the *Katherine's* living ballast, except that it was dirty business and he had no taste for it—only a sort of contempt for the men who were to profit by it. It had not occurred to him that he shared their taint; nor did it now. He was not making any money by it, and that was enough for him. But it hurt him—what she had said.

Women had not made any deep impression on him before tonight. But she had halted him, so to speak, in mid-stride; and her presence had left him breathless. The memory of her soft cool fingers pressing gently on his bare arm while she was bandaging the wound still lingered with him. It lingered, and the memory increased his pain—for with it there was the other memory of her scorn, a scorn that stung more deeply because she had been unconscious that she had shown it.

Well, here he was, a smuggler, even though the smuggling were now done and lay behind him. A disreputable rover of the Seven Seas, come to the place whither his thoughts had been harking ever since his boyhood days, the neighborhood where his father had grown to manhood. And that was his first greeting on his arrival—a girl's scorn!

And now what was to come?

His thoughts were none too pleasant when he reached the road's end. A walled-in courtyard at the rear of the house of white stone, and here on the side of the building where he was, a heavy door of planking, stained by the damp sea-winds. The road led straight to it; it was the main entrance.

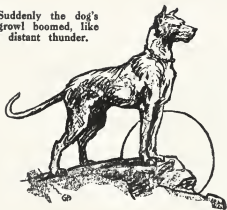
For the house fronted the open sea where the mountain broke so steeply that its flank was all scarred with cliffs. Standing, as the building stood, with the ocean before you, you had on the right hand the lone tree and the spring, and the heap of boulders at its crest.

There was a great knocker of wrought iron on the door's planking. Larry raised it; and when it fell, the sound was startling in its loudness. A moment of silence, then a heavy footstep. The blind door swung open. The man who stood within the threshold was as tall as Larry; his shoulders were wide; but there was, all over him from head to foot, a sort of soft roundness,—and this although he was in no wise fat,—a doughy easiness of lines that seemed unhealthy. When Larry first looked at him, it was impossible to tell whether he was young or old or middle-aged, for his hair and features and eyes all seemed alike: they were all of them pale. It was when the young fellow had let his glance linger for some time that he became aware of a multitude of fine lines upon the doughy features, little lines that squirmed as they appeared, and then they vanished. The dull eyes widened slightly when they fell on Larry's face; they roved at once to the canvas sack in his hand, and the man spoke:

"Come in." His voice had the same softness that his face and body had, a softness in which there was no gentleness. And though the two had not shaken hands, Larry had a feeling very much as if he had just reached out and laid hold of a fat slippery lizard. He noticed, when he entered, that the great dog had already vanished. The door boomed shut behind him, and he found himself standing in a large room with a wide rug of peacock blue upon the floor; overhead were rafters, and a plank ceiling of split redwood. A wide window looked seaward; and on the opposite end of the room from this was a big fireplace. He noticed a great table of dark wood bound with rawhide. The chairs were all of them deep and overstuffed, so soft that he sank into the cushions when he seated himself at the other's gesture. The air was so warm that it was almost stifling.

THE man remained standing behind the table; his fingers were caressing the little canvas sack which his caller had laid upon it. They lingered on the stiff cloth, pressing gently as if to feel the

Suddenly the dog's growl boomed, like distant thunder.



shape of the hard twenty-dollar gold-pieces beneath it. The pale eyes were hanging on Larry's face; they were, when the light fell upon them, a washed-out gray, a sort of lead-color. There was in them an intentness of regard which made the ship-captain uneasy.

"Your name?" their owner asked, and Larry flushed with anger at the manner of the question. He answered it with equal abruptness.

"Hall." And then he added: "If you're the man I'm looking for, the same name as yours."

THE other's head went back, as if some one had struck him—or as if he had made a sudden discovery which he had long been dreading. Larry had risen.

"I don't know that there's any need for me to stay longer." He was wishing that he had never come here when he said it, wishing he had never got the letter which had been the means of luring him into this business, where he found himself—so he was assuring himself now—despised.

"You will count the money," he went on. "Those were my instructions—to see it was all shipshape."

The fingers continued caressing the canvas sack. The eyes remained on his face. But the brief show of emotion had already departed, and the pale features were calm. Calm, and there was a coldness in them now.

"The same name." The voice was soft as velvet. "Well, it is not an uncommon name." As if that settled the question, so far as he was concerned, for good and all, he opened the sack and laid the gold-pieces in little piles; and when he had done, "Quite right," he announced. And then, as if he had just noticed that his guest had risen:

"Sit down. There is no hurry, Captain Hall."

He walked to the window while he was speaking, and stood there for a moment looking out upon the sea with a path of moonlight on the long swells, far beneath. And when he spoke again, his eyes came back to Larry with a steady dull intentness.

"This is your first trip with the schooner?"

"First and last." Larry was still standing, half in the mind to go; but the reason for his coming in the first place had occurred to him. And now he was allowing his feelings to get between him and this errand. So he went on, and less abruptly: "I spoke of our name. It was because my father used to live here—it must have been somewhere close by, from what he told me. He never mentioned any relatives, but it occurred to me—"

"Your father?" the other interrupted, and he was speaking as if his breath were gone. The little lines were squirming on his face, and for the moment he looked old and stooped. The eyes were crafty, but he had turned his head, and Larry did not see the change; and if he had seen it, he might not have noticed it, for his mind was filled with other things.

"My father," he said; "Thomas Hall."

"No." Softness had departed from the voice of Bradley Hall; it was hard and shrill. He remained standing before the window with his back to Larry for some moments after he had uttered the word; then he faced the younger man again, and he was speaking quietly once more. "I remember now. There was a Thomas Hall. It was years back. He went away. He was"—he paused for a bare instant—"no kin of mine."

"All right." Larry shrugged his shoulders. "Not that it matters," he added. For there was much in the situation to make him feel decidedly on the defensive. That girl, drawing back from him as if he were beneath her! And this man—in whose house she was a guest—so set in disclaiming any relationship with him! He was as anxious to leave the house now as he had been to enter it when he saw it from the *Katherine's* deck some hours before.

"We'll be ready to take on that cargo of lime in the morning," he said stiffly. "My first mate will be in charge." He started for the door. Bradley Hall stood where he was.

"Going to be ashore yourself, Captain?" he asked softly.

"Going to Monterey," Larry told him over his shoulder. "I've a little legal business to look after."

"To Monterey?" The voice had taken on that hard shrill note again. It softened at once. "It's a long day's ride, Captain. You'll need a good horse."

"I suppose I can lay hold of one down at the landing," Larry had his hand upon the latch.

If he had looked around, he would have seen how the other was standing with his head forward, and how the pendulous lower lip was thrust out as if the man were thinking hard and fast. But he did not look around; and so he was unwarned, for the time being.

"You might get an animal down there." The voice was as soft as silk—and as cold as ice. "But the chances are, it would be a half-broken colt. And the trail is bad. No. You must let me lend you one, Captain. Sit down a moment, won't you? I'll see to it now."

His host was on the way to an inner door while he was speaking. He waved the young skipper to a chair, and the door closed after him. Larry was thinking that perhaps he had been letting his embittered feelings get the better of him, that he had been misjudging this namesake of his; for a sailor—no matter if he be fore-castle hand or an officer on the quarterdeck—has about as much suspicion in his nature as a child. So he sat there alone in the high-ceilinged room, assuring himself that Bradley Hall was a pretty decent fellow, after all. His thoughts strayed to the girl out there in the moonlight; in spite of the bitterness he felt, he could not help wondering about her—who was she, and what was she doing here, a guest in this strange house? And while he was busy with his speculations, the door opened; Bradley Hall entered.

The presence of a strong excitement was upon him, as if during his absence he had encountered something which had stirred him deeply, something that remained with him, whose presence he could not conceal. His brow was damp, and his lips were dry; he passed his tongue over them to moisten them before he spoke; his eyes were like two specks of lead in his big white face. Even his hair seemed to have shared the pallor of his features. His voice was shaking a little as if tremulous with a great eagerness.

"It's arranged," he said. "The horse will be ready for you when you call in the morning." The eyes roved to the window, and then to the door; they came back to the younger man's, and they dropped at once. And Larry felt this change which had come over the man; he sensed it rather than he saw it; but because he had not liked this other in the first place, he set it down to his original aversion, and thought no more of it. Bradley Hall moistened his lips again and went on hurriedly:

"You came up by the road?" And without waiting for an answer: "There's a better way down to the beach, a short-cut. The cañon is black dark now; you'll get the moonlight if you take the path. Take the road that leads off in front of the house and follows the side of the mountain."

"Thanks." Larry opened the door as he was speaking. "I'll see you in the morning."

Bradley Hall made no answer but stood there in the center of the room



gazing after him; the big soft face was alive with little twisted lines. His lips were parted as if his breath were coming hard. So he remained, staring as if the sight of the departing guest had an uncanny fascination for him. The door closed, but he did not change his position for a long time.

CHAPTER VI

MURDER COMES CLOSE

IT was perhaps a dozen yards to where the path turned from the road. And before Larry reached the spot, he heard a soft footfall behind him. He turned

his head; the great dog was at his heels. It nudged his hand with its cold muzzle, and he smiled down into the upturned eyes.

"I think," he mused, "that I like you better than your master." The brute pressed closer against him. Then suddenly the head went up and the ears came forward; the animal became tense; its growl boomed like distant thunder. Larry seized the collar as it lunged forward. The girl whom he had seen beside the spring was coming up the road.

He spoke sharply to the dog; and at the sound of his voice, it ceased growling. His hand tightened its hold on the steel-linked collar, and he braced himself to pit his strength against the first mighty lunge. He spoke again,—as he had spoken often from the quarterdeck,—quietly now, and with the sureness of one accustomed to command. The strain on the collar subsided; the ears went back, and the dog looked up at him. The girl had come close.

"It's all right," Larry told her. "I'll hold him while you pass."

THOUGH her face had paled, she smiled and came on. She was looking into Larry's eyes; he saw there was a troubled look in her own, and thought he knew the reason.

"He'll mind me. You needn't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," she said, and then he saw her press her lips tight as with a sudden resolution. She took two swift steps, and paused before them. Her hand went out—a little hand, and it looked very white and fragile in the moonlight. It rested on the great dog's head.

"Quiet, you." Larry's voice had deepened; and the brute looked up at him, then at the girl. It stood there like a statue of gleaming bronze while her hand stroked the massive head.

"You seem to have mastered him," he said. She shook her head.

"No. It's you that's mastered him. He's doing it for you. They say he killed a man once; I know he's injured others badly. But when you got the best of him, back there a little while ago, he became yours. I could see that—when he followed you away. If you were to say the word now, he'd fly at my throat."

"Well, I'm not going to say it." He had remembered their parting again, and his voice chilled.

"I've been waiting for you to come." She was speaking softly, her hand still upon the great dog's head. "I wanted to tell you—how sorry I am for what I said. It wasn't meant—not the way you took it. But it must have sounded very badly. And after what you did—you saved my life, perhaps. And I never even said a word to thank you!"

She was standing very close to him, her face upturned; her eyes were warm, and her lips were trembling a little; the mass of her hair lay dark, the little locks that strayed at the edges glowing where the moonlight touched them. If he had been far more embittered than he was, he could not have held a trace of anger then. As it was, he was being overwhelmed by a desire to reach out and take her in his arms.

"I'm sorry," he cried, "sorry I made you feel badly. It wasn't what you said—it was—" He hesitated, striving to make his meaning clear. "Maybe," he smiled down at her, "it was because I had a guilty conscience. You see, you were right—about that smuggling. And—well, there's no two ways about it—it's dirty business. And when I came up here and saw you—and you said it without thinking what you said, it sort of hit me between the eyes. The contrast, I mean. Me, coming from the landing of those Chinamen, and you. That's what hurt."

"A guilty conscience." She repeated the words slowly, then shook her head. "You didn't speak as if you had one when you left me."

He remembered what he had said then about the money that he was bringing to her host in the stone house, and it came back to him—the strangeness of her presence here.

"I shouldn't have said it," he was beginning, when she stopped him.

"It sounded logical enough to me." She was looking at the house while she spoke, and now her eyes returned to his face. "If I ask you something, will you tell me?" He bowed his head. She went on: "You had a canvas bag of money, and it was to go to—" She hesitated as if somehow she did not like to speak the name, and then she added: "You said—to Bradley Hall?"

"It's not my secret," he answered, "but I don't mind telling you, for all that. Yes. It was money, and it went to him."

"And it was for those Chinese you landed?"

"It was," he said, "as near as I can

judge, for fare—ten dollars a head, paid to him for their transportation inland by his tramway."

HER face had changed while they were speaking of this; now it wore a certain pinched look; there was the shadow of pain in her eyes, and with it, the presence of scorn.

"It seems unbelievable," she whispered as if to herself; then she threw her head back, and she smiled as her eyes met his again. "I can understand the way you felt, when I said that."

"Well, I don't know that I had any reason to be so touchy," he told her. "I went into the deal with my eyes open. And I was glad to get the berth. If my namesake here makes money out of it—why, I've made wages."

"Your namesake?" she looked at him questioningly. "Your name is Hall?"

He nodded.

"My namesake and your host—I think you said awhile ago. I thought maybe he was a relative of mine, but he soon put me out of that notion. My father used to live in this neighborhood." And because it gave him the opportunity to keep her here before him, he went on to tell her of the old letter in his sea-chest, and how its former readings had invariably led him into some wild adventure of the sea.

"Always the same," he said, "trouble every time I read it! And this time the mix-up brought me to the very neighborhood where I've been wanting to come. It's things like that, make a man believe in luck and signs."

She had been listening wide-eyed, with parted lips; when he finished, her breath was coming quickly.

"Do you know what I was wishing when I came out here an hour ago?" she murmured. "Standing there by the spring and looking down at the fire on the beach, and the schooner in the moonlight, I was saying to myself: 'How wonderful it would be, if she were bringing some one to me, and he would climb the hill and find me here, and tell me of strange places he had been, and of storms and fighting!' And then—you see—you came—" She ended abruptly, and the color had rushed to her face. For his eyes were gazing down into hers, the light of eagerness in them. He laughed, trying to hide the sudden feeling she had aroused.

"Such things as I told of are fine when a fellow tells them," he said light-

ly; "but when they're going on, they're mostly hard work and loss of sleep."

She was thinking how some men would not have turned it off that way; and how near he came—as he stood here before her, tall and big and dark, with the bold eyes under the heavy black brows—how near he came to the figure of her day-dreaming. And while she dreamed—so she was thinking now—she could forget certain difficult facts which the very near future held in store for her. So she raised the hand that had been resting on the great dog's head, and laid it ever so lightly on his arm.

"Tell me more," she demanded. "We'll walk down to the spring."

So they walked slowly with the huge dog following at Larry's heels, and he told her of his roving over the Seven Seas: of ugly weather and strange ports, of islands in the tropics, and of Chinese river-mouths, and of the old whaling days, when the ship had followed the ice-floes up through Bering straits into the Arctic. And at last, when they had retraced their steps, and were standing once more within the black shadow of the stone house:

"In the morning," he said, "I'm going to Monterey, to see this man Barton, who wrote the letter."

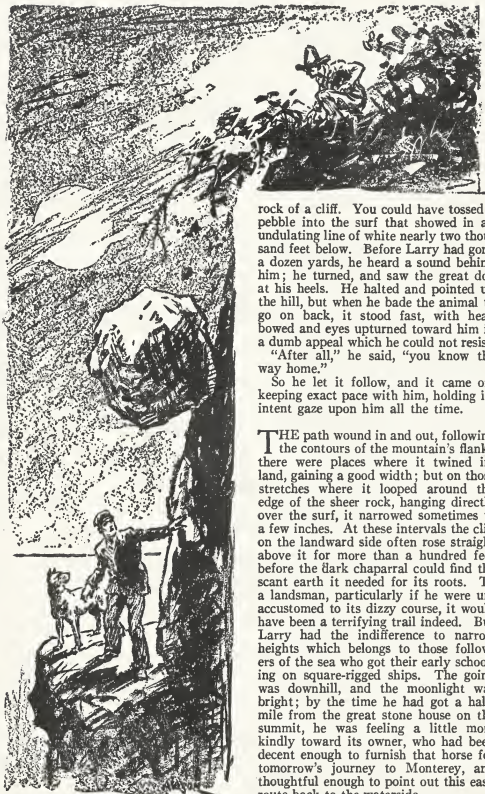
While he was saying it, her little face set with a sudden determination. But he did not see this; he only heard her quick reply, and his pulses raced then; for this hour with her had been to him like one of those bright dreams from which one awakens with regret, to face a world where there is no romance.

"Perhaps we'll see each other," she said; "for I'm going to Monterey myself tomorrow."

Which was the truth; but she failed to mention the fact that she had only this moment arrived at that decision to make the trip.

SO they bade each other good-night, and he stood watching her until the heavy door of the stone house closed behind her; then, when the building had swallowed her, he realized that he did not even know her name. And when he sought the short-cut to the beach, of which Bradley Hall had told him, he hardly noticed where he went, so busy were his thoughts, living over the moments he had spent with her.

A dizzy path; it clung to the side of the mountain, and here, right at the beginning, it was gouged from the solid



The great dog growled. . . . Larry whirled to see the enormous boulder.

rock of a cliff. You could have tossed a pebble into the surf that showed in an undulating line of white nearly two thousand feet below. Before Larry had gone a dozen yards, he heard a sound behind him; he turned, and saw the great dog at his heels. He halted and pointed up the hill, but when he bade the animal to go on back, it stood fast, with head bowed and eyes upturned toward him in a dumb appeal which he could not resist. "After all," he said, "you know the way home."

So he let it follow, and it came on, keeping exact pace with him, holding its intent gaze upon him all the time.

THE path wound in and out, following the contours of the mountain's flank; there were places where it twined inland, gaining a good width; but on those stretches where it looped around the edge of the sheer rock, hanging directly over the surf, it narrowed sometimes to a few inches. At these intervals the cliff on the landward side often rose straight above it for more than a hundred feet before the dark chaparral could find the scant earth it needed for its roots. To a landsman, particularly if he were unaccustomed to its dizzy course, it would have been a terrifying trail indeed. But Larry had the indifference to narrow heights which belongs to those followers of the sea who got their early schooling on square-rigged ships. The going was downhill, and the moonlight was bright; by the time he had got a half-mile from the great stone house on the summit, he was feeling a little more kindly toward its owner, who had been decent enough to furnish that horse for tomorrow's journey to Monterey, and thoughtful enough to point out this easy route back to the waterside.

Here where he was now, the path took a wide swing seaward along the face of

a steep declivity—so steep that it was almost a cliff, yet it did not have the solidity of the living rock. The trail itself was so narrow that he had to place one foot in front of the other, and he was leaning inward toward the lofty bank, upon whose surface little clumps of adventurous brush showed black in the moonlight.

Then the great dog growled.

It was a sound to chill a man's blood, that growl; Larry halted abruptly, and whirled in his tracks; and for the instant when he faced the brute, he had the thought that it was about to spring on him. Then, as he looked down upon it, standing there with the hair bristling along the back of its neck and its cropped ears erect, he learned his mistake.

The rending sound of upturned brush; the rush of earth and broken rubble, and almost in the same moment that he heard these things, a dull crash. He had thrown himself back against the mountain-side. Now he turned in time to see the enormous boulder which had made that crash, soaring through the air past him. It struck on the flank of the hill again, and ricocheted outward, then vanished in the boiling surf.

And there before him, less than a yard away, in the spot where he would have been himself if the dog had not warned him, the pathway was wiped out. For the passing of a moment he leaned against the bank, a little weak.

The great dog growled again, and more loudly than before; it was striving frantically to climb the steep bank; the dirt and rubble rolled from its claws; it lost its footing as Larry looked, and fell back. It would have gone over the brink if he had not caught it by the collar of steel links and dragged it to the path.

"Close call for both of us!" he said under his breath. "Well, we're even now. You saved me, and I saved you."

He glanced up at the mountain-side; some little stones were still rattling down the steep slope. The clumps of chaparral showed black in the moonlight—and between them the shadows, black as the substance from which they fell. Nothing to show where the substance ended and the shadow began. A man could be lying in one of those sable pools completely hidden.

But that idea did not cross Larry's mind. And when he thought of Bradley Hall in connection with the danger he

had run, his anger was quite unmixed with suspicion. He went back up the hill, urging the dog ahead of him, and took the longer road down to the beach.

CHAPTER VII

TWO HATREDS—TWO PLOTS

ON this morning with his wedding just three days away, Bradley Hall was breakfasting alone. On the south end, the wide veranda where he was sitting was shut off from the sea-breeze by many panes of glass. To the east, the walled courtyard got all the early sun, and here the porch was open, so that the chirping of many little birds was like the music of a wonderful orchestra of tiny instruments, to make the meal more pleasant. The enclosure was patchworked in vivid colors by masses of flowers, for which adobe soil had been carried up two thousand feet and more from the lowlands.

But neither music nor blossoms nor the alluring prospect of the marriage which was to come so soon was sufficient—nor all of them together, for that matter—to bring the prospective bridegroom into a pleasant frame of mind. When a man has waited a good five years and more, watching the slip of a girl whose budding beauty had intrigued him while she flowered into the loveliness of the early promise, and when he is on the eve of plucking the flower, with none to raise a voice in protest, it would seem as if his happiness should be unalloyed. Moreover, Bradley Hall was well beyond the age where a man has the right to expect the freshness and the fragrance of youth as his portion. For all that, he was frowning down at his plate, and his big pasty face was a dull leaden color with the rage rising within him. Things had gone wrong.

The failure of events to bend themselves to his pleasure had begun the night before; and he had risen a short time ago to the realization that he had started something which he must needs finish—and that very promptly—if he wished his future to remain unclouded by some exceedingly ugly complications. Now while he had been sitting at the table brooding over the fact that last evening's caller was again to call this morning, when the latter should by all rights have been a battered body tossing in the surf beneath the cliffs, there had come to him still more bad news.

The old Indian woman who was attending on the table had brought the tidings; and because she had an idea that they were going to be unpleasant, she was smiling, after the manner of her kind when they are apologetic.

"Señor," she said, "the Señorita Madeline, she is send word that she weel not be here today."

It was that smile upon her leathern features which roused his anger—for he had an idea when he saw it that the old creature was laughing inwardly at him. He lost his temper enough to demand:

"Won't be here? Where is she going now?"

"Señor," the old woman replied, "I do not know thees. She has told me jus' what I say to you, an' that ees all."

HE nodded in silence, bending his eyes upon his plate. The fact that this poor creature who attended his wants had caught him off his guard made his rage hot within him, though outwardly he was as cold as ice now. . . . He was thinking of the girl whom he was to marry in three days. During all those years while she had been at school he had seen her only a half a dozen times; and yesterday, when she had come here for the impending marriage, she had vanished after dinner, to be away outside somewhere, all evening long. And now—was she purposely avoiding him? Was there some other man?

Well, if she was avoiding him, the time was close at hand when she would no longer be able to slip away from him. As for a man—he told himself that was poor business, to let himself get jealous now. Time enough for jealousy when there was any cause. He went on with his breakfast, but the music of the little birds was not for him now, nor was the brightness of the blossoms. Nor, for that matter, the prospective happiness of marriage; he was living in his thoughts just now, and his thoughts were ugly.

He finished his coffee and lighted a cigarette. He sat there smoking, staring straight before him with his leaden eyes. The Indian woman came again. He spoke without turning his head.

"Pedro there?"

"He ees not come yet," she replied, and the little lines upon his face became distinct; there was something devilish in the set features.

"But there ees one waiting outside," she added. He nodded, and she shuffled away. The courtyard gate squeaked on

its hinges, and when he looked up again, a woman was standing before the table. He shrugged his shoulders, and his big face was like a dough mask.

"Maria!" His soft voice was cold as ice.

She was still young; anyone could see that the time was not far gone when she had owned her share of dusky beauty; but the great black eyes were shadowed with weariness; the face was worn like an old woman's. Her lean brown arms hugged her lank breasts; the calloused fingers clutched the coarse black dress, and the thin bosom heaved beneath them.

"Señor," she said and her voice was broken, as if much weariness and sorrow had cracked it, rubbing off the sweetness that had once been there, "it is my man. He is been sick so long. You remember? The hurt he got when he was working at the lime-kilns. He is only get up last week, and we are poor. Because he could not work, you see, there is no money. And the rent—"

"This is the second month now," His voice was still soft as he interrupted her, but it was the cold softness which had made Larry Hall think of a slippery lizard the night before. "You had your warning thirty days ago. You'll have to go."

"But señor," she cried, and she came a step nearer. Her arms went out in appeal. Then the great eyes flashed. Her voice dropped, and she spoke rapidly. "I do not ask it for myself. And there was a time when I could have asked much more. Did I say no to anything you ask me then? You remember that. When I was living in this house! I said no word when you told me to go. I loved you then; but I did not complain. And then my man came to me, and he has been very good to me, señor. It is for him I ask it. Until he is earn some money—then you get the rent."

He was not paying any heed to her; it was as if he did not hear her words at all; and when she had done, he was still looking straight before him.

"I can use the land myself," he said over his shoulder. And that was all.

BUT if he had turned his head a little he would have been repaid for the trouble; for during that moment before she took her first step to depart, a change had come over her. She had not stirred, and her features had not moved; but of a sudden she was no longer pitiful; she was now terrible.

Then she went out in silence.

And Bradley Hall smoked on, looking straight before him. The old Indian woman shuffled in again.

"Pedro is come," she said, and withdrew; and when Bradley Hall looked around, the man whom she had announced was standing before him—dark as a negro, wide of shoulder and short of stature, with arms that reached almost to his knees. He was the first to speak.

"The captain of the schooner—he ees coming up the heel."

Bradley Hall remained silent for some time, his leaden eyes fixed upon the dark face. The man was pure Indian, not a trace of Spanish blood in him. And he stood there after the manner of his breed, than whom no others can show so much of indifference. But as the moments went by, the indifference began to melt away; the black eyes became uneasy, and the big body changed its position. Then the white man spoke:

"Well, what about it?"

THE other shuffled one foot, staring down at it.

"You said for me to come an' tell you," he muttered.

"I think," Bradley Hall replied softly, "I'll get some one else to do this. I'm through with you, Pedro."

"Señor—" the black man began, but the other cut him short.

"Last night I told you what to do, and how to do it. And then—" He raised his hand as the Indian started to speak again. "When I tell a man to do a thing, I don't want excuses. If you went out today—"

"Last night," the other cried, "it was hees good luck comes to save heem. He stops jost at the right time. How could I help thees? I tell you, he weel have no good luck today. I promise you."

"I will tell you one thing." The voice was like silk. "If I let you go, and if you come back without doing what you know you are to do, it will be bad luck for you. Very bad luck!"

"Yes, señor," Pedro whispered eagerly.

"All right. You've time to be in the saddle and ride ahead before he starts. And remember—nowhere near my land. And"—he passed his tongue over his dry lips—"he just drops out of sight. No body to be found afterward."

"Yes, señor." The Indian turned as he said it, and was on his way to the courtyard gate. Bradley Hall sat there

wiping the little drops of perspiration from his forehead; he was breathing heavily.

So he sat; and his soft full face was still moist; his eyes were like two specks of lead, for a long time. . . . Larry came on up the hill. And the girl Madeline was riding up the long trail which looped along the hillsides following the coastline to the distant road which led to Monterey.

AND while the girl rode on, looking backward sometimes, and sometimes looking out across the heaving sea of whose strange far-off coastlines she had been hearing the night before, while Larry was striding up the steep road that scarred the mountain-side, eager to be setting forth on his own journey, while Bradley Hall was sitting in the flowered courtyard, sweating with the thought of the ugly thing that he had plotted—

While these things were taking place, another conspiracy was in process of discussion, within a half-mile of the bleak house of white stone.

Here in a little two-room cabin of split planks among the chaparral on the mountain's summit, Maria was talking with her man José. Not much of a cabin, and not much of a place—a bit of clearing, where the brush had been removed and the shallow soil had been plowed. No land for any man to covet—especially if he was rich. But to those two who sat within the hovel, it had the preciousness of home.

José was a good five years younger than the woman who was leaning forward in the dimness of the room whispering the words to him, and, as it was with the woman, the Indian was strong in his blood. As she went on, his eyes glowed, and the light within them was changing his swarthy face, so that it was not pleasant to look upon.

"Our little house," she whispered, "and we must leave it! And all we have, because he says so. Listen to me, José, to what I tell you, what I have never told you before." She drew closer to him; she laid her hand upon his arm, and when she had told him, he groaned.

"Why do you let me know?" he cried. "Now after these years of ours together."

"Because of what he did today," she went on rapidly. "When I was young, he took me; and when he was through with me, he turned me out. And now you know this. And today he turned



us out—the two of us together. And we are going, you and I; we are going now. But when we go—”

She bent close to him again, and her face was like a carving from dark stone; all life and warmth and human feeling had departed from it. Only the eyes were still living; they glowed like two coals. He crossed himself, and he drew back at what she whispered; and she laughed—it was not good to hear that laugh.

“After what I told you of him?” she asked.

“But this one—she is a girl, and she has done nothing to us!” he protested.

“And if he gives us the money, we will do her no harm. She will come back to him as good as when we took her. Listen here, *José mio*.” She stroked his face with her hands as she went on: “It is so easy. I have thought of it. It came to me when I went from the house and saw her riding down the hill. We have the horses, and they are fresh. The trail over the Piñon is good, and we will ride fast; we will reach the coast road ahead of her. We will be gentle with her—unless she cries out too loud, or makes some trouble. And when we have

her, then we will send the word to him—the word that if he wants his bride, he is to pay. And he will pay.”

She stroked his face again.

“If you had heard him when I begged this morning! When I told him how it was—the time that you lost with the broken leg—and it was broken at the work for him; and when he shook his head, and I brought it back to his mind—the days before—when he had done with me as he pleased—”

“It is enough,” he cried. He had got to his feet. “I will catch the horses.”

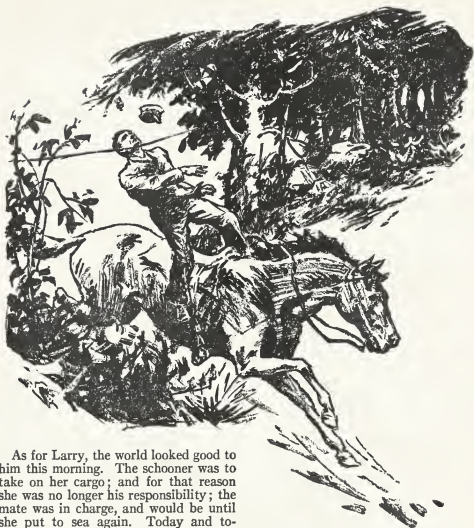
CHAPTER VIII

A SAILOR ON HORSEBACK

THE trail up the coast to Monterey wound through the great redwoods at the mouth of the cañon and crept on behind some lower hills until it reached the long wooded point to the north of the bay where the *Katherine* lay. So from the schooner's deck it was invisible. This, Pedro knew; and he had his own ideas as to carrying out the order which Bradley Hall had given him, ideas which he would have set forth, had he found his master in a better frame of mind; but as it was, he kept them to himself, satisfied that as long as he got results, it did not matter if he overlooked small details of the instructions.

For Pedro had in mind something that he had seen the night before, something which he would have told to Bradley Hall if it had not been for the other's ill temper. It had been a long wait for him there on the mountain-side, where the loose boulder lay, ready to crash down upon the path when he gave it a good shove; and once, thinking that the intended victim must have chosen the other route to the beach, he had climbed back to the summit—just in time to see Larry and Madeline saying their good-night.

This little scene he was remembering now; and it had given him the basis for the idea which he meant to carry out. He had already put in a good hour riding out into the hills to arrange matters. And now he was telling himself that his soft-faced employer, who was pretty well known hereabouts as a master of dubious strategy, could not have spun a better web than he had. So, instead of riding on ahead up the coast trail, he was waiting in the redwoods until Larry would come down the hill from the stone house.



As for Larry, the world looked good to him this morning. The schooner was to take on her cargo; and for that reason she was no longer his responsibility; the mate was in charge, and would be until she put to sea again. Today and tomorrow were his, and part of the day after. The mountain-tops were bathed in the warm sunshine; and the high fog that was beginning to drift in from the open sea meant no anxiety for him. Monterey lay ahead of him, and a visit to the lawyer who had sent that letter in his sea-chest. The country which he had longed to see ever since he was a little boy, the country of which his father had told him. And here, somewhere ahead of him on the trail that wound northward, the girl—

When he had returned to the schooner late last night, the memory of Madeline came with him; it kept him awake for a long time; and when he awakened this morning, it had been on hand to greet him. The touch of her fingers on his arm; the sound of her voice in his ears, and the picture of her face before him, when she had told him that today she might see him again. He would ride

A rope of rawhide, stretched taut! His head flew back as abruptly as if he had been struck with a clenched fist.

fast. And—he dared to hope she would not be hurrying.

He was not thinking of Bradley Hall, save as the man who had promised him the loan of that horse, which was to carry him to Monterey. So there was only one little shadow to mar the brightness of his anticipations; it had appeared when he was taking his leave of Riley in the cabin, and the first mate had said:

"I been thinking, sir, maybe it might be a good idee if you was to buy a revolver when you get to town. After what happened to Hansen!" Larry had promised to get the weapon; but that premonition of possible trouble in the future did not linger in his memory any longer than it took him to get over the rail and into the yawl.

ON the beach he found a friend waiting for him. The seamen had leaped from the boat and were pulling it in up on the sand when he made the discovery; they shrank back, seeing the great dog standing before them, and it would have leaped upon them if Larry had not sprung from the boat and got to its side. Then it stood rigid, looking up into his face with its reddened eyes.

"Been pacin' up and down the beach like it was a skipper on his own quarter-deck, sir," one of the hands told him. "And not a single greaser has come nigh the place since sunup."

Larry looked at the tracks in the loose sand; no doubt of it—the brute had been here all night long. So he went up the hill with the great dog at his heels, but when he came to the stone house on the summit, it was not there. He had it in mind to speak of this to Bradley Hall, but the old Indian woman who answered his knock told him that the latter was not in. He had, she said, left word as to the horse, and Larry was to get it at the stables. To her the young fellow mentioned the matter of the dog, and she crossed herself.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she whispered. "Is that devil loose?"

The stables were a good two hundred yards from the house, and Larry found the horse there, saddled and ready. It was his first time in the saddle since he had been a boy in the north coast country; and he was feeling like a boy again as he rode away. The great dog was nowhere in sight; but once, while he was riding down the long loops of the road before it plunged into the groves of tan oaks, he heard sounds of voices—men's voices upraised in terror behind him; and he wondered if the brute was making trouble up there at the house. A few moments later he had something else to think of, and the dog went from his mind.

WHERE the road reached the bed of the cañon, a side-trail turned abruptly up the gulch—that same Piñon trail of which Maria had spoken to José. Here overhead the tramway's cable showed, and a metal bucket hanging idly from the steel strands; for the lime which the *Katherine* was to take was down at the little wharf, and the kilns were burning new rock up in the hills.

As Larry was about to pass the forks of the two routes, Pedro appeared suddenly. His mass of dead-black hair hung low over his forehead, and the eyes

upturned to the rider's were glowing in the shadow of the huge trees. Bad eyes—set too closely. But Larry forgot that first impression when the other spoke.

"Meester Captain!" Pedro's voice was musical, like the voices of most of his race. "A lady leave word for you to come weeth me."

Larry had pulled up, and he was still frowning a little with the distrust aroused by those bad eyes.

"Yes?" he asked, and the word came curtly; but his heart was skipping a beat or two, for all that. "Who do you mean?"

"She ees Mees Madeline; an' she has tol' me to wait here for you an' tell you, you shall come the Piñon trail." He stretched out one long arm and pointed up the cañon. Larry's frown became puzzled. This the speaker saw, and went on quickly: "She is to go to Monterey today by that way. When you have ride ten miles, you come out to the coast road. Ee's w'at you call a short-cut. An' she ees tell me to show you the way, for ee's not easy to fin'."

That settled the matter as far as Larry was concerned. If he had far more tangible cause to distrust the messenger, he would have followed him blithely. So he simply said:

"All right!" And before he started up the side trail, while Pedro was getting his waiting horse, he dismounted to tighten his cinch—which, as matters turned out, was a very good thing for him.

The trail followed the windings of the cañon bed, and here where the great trees were like the pillars of a cathedral, the morning sunlight came slanting down in long shafts; the little dust-motes showed moving in those oblique pathways overhead; the green lacework of the branches all but shut out the sky. The only sounds were the dull thudding of the horses' hoofs on the soft earth, and the gurgling of the stream; now and again the path crossed it at some turn.

The going became steeper; they took up the side hill in a series of abrupt zig-zags with the branches of the giant trees about them, and the dull roaring of a waterfall below. Then the light began to brighten, and they came out among scattered tan oaks. So for two miles and more, mounting all the time, with an occasional glimpse of wider reaches where the dwarf lupin and the poppies made a carpet of purple and gold. At last they found themselves on a rocky hillside,

where the maguey spikes rose a good ten feet high in full flower above the clusters of daggerlike leaves, and lizards darted among the sunbaked rocks.

Behind them the fog was sweeping in from the ocean, blanketing the tree-tops. In front of them the sun blazed hot. The upper reaches of the cañon lay far beneath them on their left hand. Here at its very head the trail took a long loop, and Larry could see where it swung across the ridge that flanked the gulch on the north. A hundred yards or so ahead of him, several columns of smoke rose into the cloudless sky. There, where the tramway's spidery strands came to an end, he picked out several rude ovens of loose rock—the kilns where Bradley Hall's men burned lime for the San Francisco market.

HE had drawn rein to rest his horse; and he had glanced back where the fog was sweeping in. Now he turned his head again. During all this time he had not spoken to his guide, and the latter had said no word to him. Pedro had thrown his leg across the saddle-horn to ease his position for the moment of the rest, and Larry's look had caught him by surprise. The dark face was regarding him; it had awakened to a quick intentness; the eyes were alive with a sudden excitement. It was as if the man were fairly sweating with a cruel eagerness.

This vanished at once. The eyelids dropped; the parted lips closed over the white teeth; and when the lids raised again, the dark face was heavy with submission. The change had come so abruptly that Larry was half inclined to doubt what he had first seen. Then Pedro raised his arm, and pointed to the spot where the trail crossed the northern ridge.

"You see the way," he said. "Eet ees easy riding for ten mile. Then downhill to the coast road."

"How about the lady you told me of?" Larry asked sharply.

"She's op there, where they burn the lime," the other answered softly. He shifted his foot back to the stirrup, and reined his horse up the slope beside the trail. "Me, I weel ride back now," he added quietly.

The statement made Larry forget the feeling of distrust which had come over him. If Pedro was leaving him—why,

then why fear him? And it was with a distinct feeling of relief that he went on alone. But when he had gone some fifty yards, he felt the uneasiness again, and looked around. Pedro had not moved, but sat there in the saddle with his head thrust forward; and there was something in his attitude which Larry did not like, an intentness which suggested that same look he had caught on the dark face a moment before.

So it came that while the trap which had been set was waiting for him just ahead, Larry's half-awakened suspicions were with what lay behind. And for this reason he failed to notice how the ears of the horse went forward suddenly a moment later.

Where he was riding, the hillside was steep, and the trail was narrow. A shelf of the white limestone rose on his right hand, and on his left a clump of second-growth tan oak made a dense thicket. Here the pathway turned sharply. Even if he had taken thought of that movement of the horse's ears, he could not have seen what it was that had caught the animal's attention. He came between the little cliff and the clump of saplings.

A SHOUT sounded behind him, and a rattle of hoofs.

He started to draw rein. But in that latter movement he was too late. His horse had already leaped forward in fright at the outcry and the rattle of approaching hoofs. And Larry was still looking over his shoulder when he was carried into the trap. He saw Pedro spurring after him, saw the black face shining with exultation, the teeth flashing behind the parted lips. And that was the last he knew.

A rope of rawhide, stretched taut! On the uphill end, a man who crouched upon his hands and knees; on the downhill end another, perched on the summit of a huge limestone boulder, gripping the *reata* with both hands. The strands caught the rider under the chin. His head flew back as abruptly as if he had been struck by a clenched fist. His senses had gone before he was swept from the saddle. And when he fell, the horse leaped on.

Before he had fairly struck, the pair who had been holding the rope were behind him. And one of them was holding a bared knife.

The second of the three generous installments into which we have divided this fine novel will appear in the next (the March) issue, on sale February 1st.

Red Sunset Land

*A writer of real distinction here gives us
a deeply moving story of love and hate
and extraordinary adventure at the ends
of the earth.*

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

MITCHELL said: "That's Ted Willis in the corner—the one with the straw hat. He had a millet plantation. He went to Papua; got lost up the Mambaré River. The chap with the big mustache is Greenhowe—a fine prospector; when the Waria broke out, he was among the first three to get on good gold. He died in 1913—blackwater, I think. The handsome kid next him was Alf Ridgwell; he was about twenty then. The head-hunters of the Hydrographers' Range got his head three years after that was taken. Jimmy Blake—that one—shot himself. He was one of the best, but he couldn't keep off it. Fortescue, this chap in the middle, got a Kuku-kuku spear through him, about the same time, I think, or maybe it was later. Wheeler, in the drill coat, was accidentally drowned off East Cape, they say, but I always thought his boys took him by the legs and held him under. Harvey, the one next the last, was lost with all hands in the Gulf, about Christmas in 1905; the natives said, and maybe they were right, that there were too many cases of 'good luck' on board—"

"What—" I began.

Somebody kicked me. "Native name for whisky. Don't head him off!"

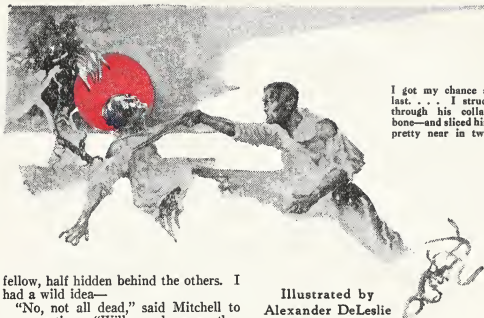
Mitchell went on, holding the faded group photograph in his hand: "Fellow in the corner? That's me; I hadn't shaved off my beard when it was taken. Well, that's the lot. What do you want to know?"

We were three newspaper-men; we had bailed up Fergus Mitchell in the lounge of the Sydney Metropole, anxious to ask him about the old times in the Western Pacific. Mitchell had struck good gold somewhere on Edie Creek, and was down in Sydney spending it. They said he was a mine of stories. . . .

I can see him now: a huge man, hard as teak, with small, pin-point brown eyes that bored through you, and a bloodhound jowl; oldish, but with deep-cut lines in his face that weren't all age; un-selfconscious as a forest tree, primitive as water and as wind. Well-dressed, but you hardly noticed that. Something attractive about him, something terrifying, something—I can only use one word for it—innocent. He had been drinking. He had been seen buying jewelry for lights-o'-love. I knew this; it seemed entirely incidental. Fergus Mitchell was—other. You couldn't have classed him, socially. The Red Sunset Land had long since wiped out any distinguishing brands. It has a way of doing this. Fergus Mitchell had been living in the western island world—Solomons, New Hebrides, New Guinea—for half of a long lifetime, and the Red Sunset had claimed him for its own. . . .

There were women in the lounge; I noticed how they followed him with their eyes; I saw how Bob Bradley, my mate, pulled up his collar, and pulled down his tie; how Wilmington bristled with hurt sex-pride; knew how I felt myself. To see one's self, twenty-odd, smart and sharp and good-looking, neglected for an old, nut-crackery fellow of fifty!

"Women!" I thought scornfully, and then: "But they know." And an idea came to me. We hadn't been successful drawing him out. He had produced an old group photograph, some uninteresting pictures of palms and beaches. He was willing to oblige—bored but good-natured. The other fellows were putting up their copy-paper. I stayed. When they were gone, and I had Mitchell to myself, I asked him, right out, who the eighth man in the photograph was. He'd skipped that one—a dark-eyed, slender



I got my chance at last. . . . I struck through his collar-bone—and sliced him pretty near in two.

Illustrated by
Alexander DeLeslie

fellow, half hidden behind the others. I had a wild idea—

"No, not all dead," said Mitchell to my question. "Will you have another drink? Coffee? So will I. I'm not dead; that's one. And that other—"

Greatly daring, I pushed my chair closer, glanced once more at the book-stall girl, who was eating him with her eyes; at the station-owner's daughters, who were talking to each other and watching him all the time. And I said: "That other—tell me about *her*."

I expected I don't know what—maybe a punch on the jaw, maybe a cool refusal. . . . Mitchell put more sugar in his coffee, and said easily: "Oh, yes. Zita Lomond. I killed a man for *her*."

And there, in the lounge, with Sydney society coming and going on its way to dinner, to dance, to theater, Mitchell drank his coffee in sips, and told me how he had done murder. I am telling it much as he told me. There were interruptions; we had a drink or two, and Mitchell had more coffee after, black as ink and full of sugar—he must have had the stomach of a bear; and people came sidling past and listened, and slipped away when I glared at them. And Mitchell, smoking and drinking, talked.

I DON'T know (said Mitchell) if you know how those islands get at you. (I did not; I don't now). Tahiti, and the Marquesas, and Samoa—all very well, and the girls near as pretty as they say, and healthy places, and not a snake or a fever mosquito, or a wild cannibal in 'em all. But the West—brandy after tea! Give me the brandy.

There were six passengers on the old

Tamboro that trip. They didn't run to tourists then. Nineteen-five, it was. You remember that.

(I said I would remember. He took no notice, and went on.)

We'd left Norfolk Island behind—pretty, gardeny, tea-party kind of place; and things were warming up toward the New Hebrides. When I feel the sun slapping me on the back, when the ship's officers come out in whites and brass buttons, and the wind-shoots are stuck in the cabins, or used to be before they had fans—looking for all the world like big gun-cartridges,—and the sea hits you in the eye, sparkling furiously, and there's a light-hearted sort of blue in the water, and at night green fire about the bows—well, that's the tropics; another world. Kipling said something about laws of God and man north of fifty-three. He might have said north and south of ten. About the equator—men and things slacken. As if the big bulge of the earth there had stretched 'em, and they must go south, or north, again, to get back. . . . There were two missionaries, and a Government bloke, and the three of us.

(I wanted to ask a question, but didn't dare.)

I was out on a prospecting trip; and you take it from me, in those big islands which no one's crossed yet,—damn their incompetence and the white livers of 'em, —there's stuff worth prospecting. The missionaries were mishing according to their trade. But he and she, they were

just out for thrills. Now, mind you, even now you can get thrills, if you're fool enough to want 'em, all over the western groups. But in nineteen-five, you didn't have to look. The thrills went looking for you.

What do you think? One of the first ports we came to, when they anchored for the night in a bay that was just like a stage backcloth in a pantomime, and the residents—eleven altogether—came along for a dance and a shivoo—what do you think, but Zita and her husband went off for the afternoon, fishing, and they came upon a native village where the people were friendly; didn't poke any poisoned arrow at you, or bash you with stone clubs, and Lomond found out that they'd been pearling on their own, and he had bought the makings of a bonzer necklace for her, and paid for it in sporting cartridges which he happened to have, and which would buy anything, pigs or wives or— Well, they came back with the pearls; you never saw such a fistful, big as peas, and Lomond didn't show them to anyone on board for fear he'd never get such a bargain again.

(Another unspoken question burned within me. It was answered. Mitchell, smoothing down the short mustache on his upper lip with a magnificent, unconscious gesture, went on:)

I COULD see, even in the moonlight, they were wonderful. (There was a blank, in the story and in his speech. He continued calmly, leaving me to catch up as I could.) I said, "Keep the bag round your neck night and day; there's a queer fish aboard." And she said, "What queer fish? I haven't seen anyone but the passengers." "Yes," says I. And she thought a bit, and said: "If you mean the recruiter we took on at Mermaid Bay, he's a very civil decent man, and I don't think you ought to—" "No," I said, "oughtn't I? And did you ever hear that he tied a native girl behind his sulky with a rope, and galloped the horse till she was almost dead?" "It's a lie," she said, sharp as mustard.

So I left her there, with that wavy light hair of hers shining something wonderful in the moonlight, like that "white" gold it was, and her eyes—you can't see 'em in the photo; a man could drown in her eyes, black seas with no bottom to 'em, like her heart. There's some women, a man might run out all the line in the world, and the lead would never touch ground, never bring up so much

as a grain of sand or gold to show you what was really there. . . .

Lomond came along, smoking a cigar. He was English, about a hundred and fifty per cent—accent you could hang your hat on, wooden face red and shiny with all the good living they used to have in those days; way of half shutting his eyes and looking at you under the lids; I believe it was a touch of short-sight; but it looked like the devil. He was of good family, and knew it. Zita—well, they said things about the time she was on the stage, but not one of them was true, not a damned one; he'd no call to be as jealous as he was.

Well, it was heaven and hell mixed that night, as it mostly is in the Red West, which is what I call that lot of islands past Fiji. Moonlight,—you never saw the like, pouring through you like a waterfall,—all the palms shining as if they'd been dipped in silver paint; the beaches white, and the iron roofs of the settlement just as if snow was piled on every one, and shadows black like black fur rugs, under the walls, and blue ink-like, about the trees. . . . Have you seen the star a coconut makes under itself on the sand, nights of full moon? Ah—till you have, don't talk.

(I was not talking. He went on:)

There was that feeling in the air that you get; it's part of it the drum-drumming that comes from the villages, like your heart when you hear it in the night; and part of it's knowing that anything may happen anywhere, and part of it's the gorgeous painting of the whole don't-care place, colors splashed. . . .

Well, Lomond had had one too many that night, I think; not too much, that's another thing, but—he started rousting on her. And before me. He told her she wasn't on the music-hall stage now, and she would please remember she belonged to a decent family. And some more like that. I would have patted him one, but she got hold of my arm, and that made him worse. So I saw the only thing I could do was to go for a walk, and I went. Anyhow, I wanted to feel the pepper and ginger of that place in my mouth again; Tahiti's treacle compared—but I said that before.

I went to the native village; I wanted to watch them dance; it was full moon, y'see, and they always reckon full moon puts the ginger into things. . . . Who, me? Yes, I do believe it. They say nowadays that the moon's radio-active; that accounts for a lot. . . . When I

Moonlight—you never saw the like; the palms shining as if dipped in silver paint, and shadows, like blue ink, about the trees.



came down to the village, they were hard at it; not what you're thinking—native dances aren't all sex-stuff, though of course some of it is, same as the fox-trot you dance with your girl, and maybe not so much. But a lot of it's stuff you could give no name to, something that goes deep, roots down to the wind and the sea and the storms, touches the big power-house that runs the world, whatever it is. That's what catches and holds. I tell you, the Stone Age men that live in those places know a sight of things that you and I forgot a million years ago. Well, I was watching it all, sitting on a log as peaceful as you please, with the feeling of the islands running through me like water through a weir, when all of a sudden the whole thing breaks off: the dancing stops, and the drums give one big roar, and then they're silent. I looked round, and there was Zita coming along in the moonlight, with that rapscallion young recruiter—come to see the dance.

"You get home as quick as you can!" says I. "The natives haven't any love to spare for you, Willis, and you know it; and anyhow, what the blazes do you mean bringing a lady down into this shivoo?"

Willis was looking a bit nervous, grinning and showing his teeth, which he was proud of, and fidgeting with his hands; but I could see, I don't know how, that

he wasn't surprised at the ending of the dance, nor at the way the natives were beginning to mill about, like cattle when they start swimmin' round and round one another in a stream. He must have known, before he brought her along, that they'd shut up the dancing. Then, what the deuce did he bring her for, thinks I.

Zita was half laughing, half scared; she'd come out for a thrill, and begged, she'd got it! They were beginning to start that ugly woof-woofing they do when they're working themselves up deliberately for mischief, and nobody can mistake what that means when they hear it. "What's the matter?" she says to Willis, very quick; and he says: "Why, I reckon they want back the stuff they sold to your husband." "What'll they do if they don't get it?" she says; and he says: "Take our heads to pay."

Now, there was just a grain of truth in all that; natives do go back on a bargain pretty often, or rather, they try to get back the goods they've sold, and keep the price—if they can. I heard afterward that Willis had been trying to get pearls out of them for some time, but they wouldn't have sold him one the size of a pinhead. How he found out about the lot Lomond had secured was simple enough; he'd seen Zita with one—sneaking, I've no doubt.

I said to Willis: "Clear out of it; maybe I can keep them quiet till you're well

away; and don't you go bringing—" He didn't hear the rest, because he was legging it up the pathway, with her hand in his, dragging her along.

I saw Willis take something from her, and stick it in his trousers pocket as they ran; but, you'll understand, I only half saw it; I had my hands full at the moment, quieting down the dancers, who weren't at all pleased at having a woman brought down to look on at them. You see, there's dances that's spoiled by a woman's presence, just as a Masonic meeting would be, and they have to start the whole dashed thing over again, as I suppose the Masons would—I'm not one myself.

WELL, when I had them quieted, I got back to the ship, and I said to the captain, who knew me:

"You'd best make some excuse, and take the ship out before morning, because they're liable to try and rush you just before dawn, if they get worked up."

"What about taking away the local whites?" he asks, but I told him: "They're all right; it's only some of your passengers the head-hunter crowd may have got a down on; better get away quietly."

So he took my advice, and we cleared for next port before midnight.

Willis came on with us, and he looked, to my mind, much too like a cat that's got at the cream. I didn't say anything; I thought things would clear up by and by. And at the next port, begad, they did. It was one of the quiet islands, where the natives didn't bother much about the whites—sort of reconciled to let 'em go their way, since they couldn't get rid of 'em, and just keeping on in their own villages, working the gardens and pig-hunting and fishing, and living as peaceable as they could, though I reckon they found things a bit dull, since the head-hunting'd gone out of fashion.

(He stopped to finish his whisky and beckoned to the waiter for another—two more, rather; he seemed to expect me to keep level with him, as a pure matter of courtesy, and any faint attempt I made at paying for drinks was simply swept aside. By this time I hardly knew what he was ordering; the big lounge, full of people, was growing curiously bright and distant to me, as I sat trying to make my glass last out, while Mitchell steadily got through his. It did not seem to affect him any more than the poisonous ink-black coffee he had been drink-

ing a little earlier. "I wonder would anything affect him?" I thought, a little vaguely. "I wonder if I hit him with an ax—" But he was going on.)

We had a lot of cargo to land and take on there; the captain said we'd stay a couple of days. It was a pretty place, that island; green grass like tennis-lawns running right down to the beach, with woods behind, black woods like something in a fairy tale; anything might have come out of 'em, and the smell of the orange trees hit you as you came in, and there were scads of the fruit bobbing about in the the water, and windrows of 'em on the sand. I wanted Zita to come ashore and see it all, so I went to her cabin, and knocked on the door. It was very quiet for a minute; there was no answer, so I reckoned she'd gone out, and I was just going to turn away, when—

(He paused for a moment. "You got a girl?" he asked, setting down his empty glass. "Well, what d'you think?" I answered indignantly. "I can tell you that—" He hadn't been listening; the question was purely rhetorical.) Just you picture to yourself, (he went on,) her crying. Crying like a little drowned cat that's been left out in the rain.

(There seemed to be a plum in my throat, a plum that swelled and ached. My hand shut itself tightly round the glass. I pictured myself doing terrible things. He went on:) I said through the door, "Zita!" She didn't answer. The door was locked. I went to the steward and said: "Where's the key of Number Ten?"

"Mr. Lomond has it, sir," he told me. "Mr. Lomond's gone ashore."

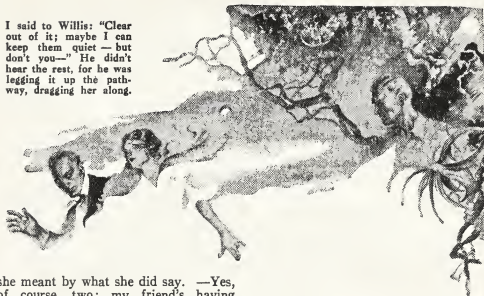
"You open that cabin," I told him, and I gave him a quid. He opened it, and cut.

Zita was lying in her bunk; she'd a white wrapper on, with lace sleeves, and I could see her arms. I took one look at 'em—and at her neck. "Do you want me to kill him for you?" I says. "No," she says, "no—he thinks he had an excuse. He thinks—" And with that she began to cry again. I said: "What excuse? Sit up and tell me; he's gone ashore, but there isn't too much time." And she said, "Willis—" And I was glad to hear that, because—

(Another of his expressive pauses. He beckoned to the waiter, and went on:)

She told me I was right about Willis. Said he was an infernal humbug, and a cursed brute—or rather, that was what

I said to Willis: "Clear out of it; maybe I can keep them quiet—but don't you—" He didn't hear the rest, for he was legging it up the pathway, dragging her along.



she meant by what she did say. —Yes, of course, two; my friend's having another. —Yes, of course, you are. She said that Willis had been after the pearls all along, that he knew she was carrying them around her neck, and got her down to the village just to scare her and make her give them up, knowing as he did that the natives were sure to go to market about her being there—

"Excuse me," I put in, "what do you think's the origin—" He did not let me finish.) Good Australian. Ever heard anyone taking pigs to market? She said that was what he meant all along, and she only found it out when he went ashore with the pearls, and wouldn't give 'em up again. She told me that, sitting up in her berth, with that lacy rag on her, and her hair—women did have hair then—all down and over her; and there were blue shadows under her eyes where she'd been crying; and by God, I swore he'd pay for every tear in good time. Her husband, I mean. Then she told me more, and I forgot all about Lomond. It seems she had gone for a walk with Willis, before she found out about the pearls—I think she was a little attracted by his poisonous sort of good looks; not much, however; she was just amusing herself—and Willis. . . . Well, her husband came up, and he was only just in time.

Of course, after that, she was scared of her life he would find out Willis had got the pearls from her; nothing'd have convinced him then she wasn't guilty; as it was, he'd knocked her about on the mere suspicion.

"What d'you think he'd do if he found out about the pearls?" I asked.

"He wouldn't believe a word I said, and he'd divorce me for certain. And I don't want to go back to the halls, or worse," she said. "It makes my heart come up in my throat to think of it."

"You're in love with him still," I said.

"In a way I am," she says. "But I'm more afraid of him, and those pearls—if he gets to know I gave them to Willis—" She was scared, and got the wind up properly; silly of her, maybe, but you think of your girl with the wind up about something, and looking at you with eyes—eyes—

So I said: "Put some powder on your face, and get into your frock, and look like something; it's going to be all right if you don't give it away." And then I heard the *scroop, scroop* of the oars of the ship's whaleboat coming back, so I went. . . . Better have a cigar. They have some here that aren't quite poisonous.

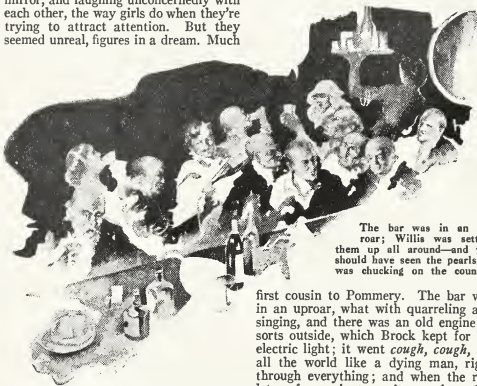
"No, no," I protested feebly, with my head singing, but he did not pay any attention. "Matches," he said, and handed me his box; I don't know how he knew that I could not get mine out. . . . He went on.)

You want to know why I didn't go to the police? I'll tell you that by and by. . . . Well, I landed, and went up that grass road that runs off from the sea; like a ride in an English wood it is—except for the oranges; they were rolling about underfoot, and the air was like a perfumer's shop, and hot—hot's a green-house when they take you through on Sunday afternoons. I went to a pub.

(He stopped, cut the end off a cigar, and lighted it. I wondered if it was as strong as mine. But I was almost past wondering; a cloud, not all smoke, was gathering between myself and the big room; I could just see the bookstall girl straining her ears to hear, and the squatter's two daughters watching him in a mirror, and laughing unconcernedly with each other, the way girls do when they're trying to attract attention. But they seemed unreal, figures in a dream. Much

"Then why did this Brock—wasn't he an honest—")

As honest as you or me. You don't understand—yet. Well, there were a lot of Frenchmen in the bar; the place is mostly French, y'know, and they were lapping up the champagne, and cursing it at the same time; I'll allow it wasn't



The bar was in an uproar; Willis was setting them up all around—and you should have seen the pearls he was chucking on the counter.

more real was the scene that Mitchell had painted for me: the hot green alley, with the oranges tumbling down it, and the palms above; the island and the little town and the hotel.)

It was a fair sort of pub—considering. They used to shut some time in the night, sooner or later; and Brock, who was owner and barman, never allowed knifing on the premises. And the gin they sold to the natives—kind that goes *whiff* when you put a match to it—was never served to whites unless they were past caring. . . . Willis was there, with his gear dumped on the floor, getting ready to make a night of it; he hadn't a feather to fly with, but he was setting them up all round, and you should have seen the way Brock shoveled up the pearls he was chucking on the counter; only the small ones, though; the rest—

("Didn't anybody know?") I broke in desperately. He answered: "Everyone knew they were stolen." And I asked:

first cousin to Pommery. The bar was in an uproar, what with quarreling and singing, and there was an old engine of sorts outside, which Brock kept for his electric light; it went *cough, cough*, for all the world like a dying man, right through everything; and when the row let up for a minute, as it sometimes did, you could hear the waves bursting on the reef outside, and what they said as plain as anything was, "*Don't care. Don't care.*" Only nobody listened.

I went up to Willis, where he stood like a king in the middle of them, treating and drinking; he wasn't drunk himself—yet, or I'd have had to wait. I was glad about that. When the Frenchies saw me, they stood back, and Brock put one hand under the counter. "You needn't," says I. "It's going to be all right and proper." And with that he took his hand out, and watched me; he looked like a man in a box at the theater who thinks he's a bit too near the stage for comfort. . . .

They were all quiet now, and some of them seemed to be sober who weren't before. You could hear the old engine go *cough, cough*, and the reef was loud.

I said to Willis: "You're going to fight me."

And he says, "When?" And I says, "Now."

And he says: "I'm game, but you're half as heavy again as me."

"Too right," I says, "but you can choose your weapons."

"Weapons?" says he.

"Yes," says I. "This is going to be a duel; not a murder."

"I can't shoot for nuts," he says, looking at me nastily. He wasn't afraid, but he was beginning not to like it. "You needn't," I said. "Choose your weapon—anything from boathooks to cannon." And the Frenchmen raised their glasses at that, and cheered; it did them more good than you could believe, to think that there was going to be a proper duel on the island, and they could all go.

So Willis said: "I choose the only thing I know anything about, and that's a three-foot clearing-knife."

"Correct," I says. So we all went off to the store to pick the weapons and get them sharpened.

("What is a—" I began. "It's like the thing they call a machete in South America. Blade like the blade of an oar, three feet of it, and a big wooden handle," he explained; and I started to ask, "And had you—" But he went on:)

No, never. But I had done a bit of broadsword, in my time. Not that that was very much good, with the different balance and all. You never saw brighter moonlight; it was just right for the duel. We fixed up to have it down on the beach, where it was as light as broad day, what with the reflection of the sea and the white sand; you never saw white sand like that. The Frenchmen were in heaven. I could have had fifty seconds, and so could he, though neither of us would bother with that kind of truck. But I said he could have a doctor if he liked; and he told me—both of us being very hot about Zita underneath, though we were talking coolly—that it would be a gravedigger would be wanted and not a doctor. And so we went down to the beach.

The Frenchmen made a ring all round us, to look on, and four of them stood inside the ring; I reckon they thought they were seconds, whether we liked it or not; you see, that kind of thing was just strawberry jam to them. They put us into fencing attitudes, and one of them dropped a handkerchief, and called out, "Engage!" And six of the rest started arguing right away if it had been done properly or not; but Willis and I didn't

mind; we were too busy trying to slice one another into bits.

I saw at once he didn't know a great deal about fencing, but the weapons were so odd that I reckoned he had his fair whack at me in any case. Perhaps I put too much of the broadsword into it; anyhow, he got me across the left arm, and drew blood, and the Frenchies wanted to strike up our swords, as they called it, but I cursed them some, and we went on.

They'd all stopped their barracking by now; I think they saw it wasn't going to be a French sort of duel. They were watching us hard, and very quiet. I remembered afterward I'd heard some one breathing pretty loud, and thought it was Willis, until I found out it was me. He gave me some trouble. I reckon he knew he was fighting for his life. There was a good deal of blood on the sand—black it looked in that light—before I saw my chance had come; and then I took it. . . . Feel my arm.

(I did. It was like ironwood. Mitchell went on:)

I got my chance at last, and struck through his collarbone, and sliced him pretty near in two. If you don't like that whisky, tell me; they have another just as good. . . . Well, drink it then.

The Frenchies raised a cheer, French sort of cheer, rather more like howling of wolves than a good hurrah. They began dribbling away; I reckon they wanted to see whether Brock mightn't stand treat a bit. . . .

WELL, they left me alone with him. I stood wiping my clearing-knife on a bit of buffalo grass, and somehow it seemed as if a train that'd been carrying me along with all the rattle and banging that trains do kick up, you know—as if it had stopped, and gone on, and left me all alone in the middle of a dead quiet, with the row dying out on the horizon, and me beginning to hear the rustle of the trees again, and the birds singing, and a sort of peaceful feeling getting hold. So I stuck the knife in the sand, and I was starting to go away, when I saw a thing that made my blood creep.

(I was anxious to know what it was that made Mitchell's blood creep. It seemed impossible.)

A half-caste girl, with shoes on, shoes with high heels. And she had come up unknown, and she was stamping with her high-heeled shoe right on Willis' face,

as he lay there dead in the moonlight. "Stop it, you!" I says. "Stop it be hanged!" she says, for she could speak English as well as you or I. "That man deserted me, and when I came and begged of him, he tied me behind his sulky, and dragged me over the road."

"Stop it," I told her. "I've wiped out all scores." She was sensible enough; she left off, and came away.

("Queen Matilda of England," I began, "trod with her heels on the face of the man who had refused her, when he was lying dead. Did you ever—") And he answered: "Of course I did; but I'm not making it up. I suppose human nature's the same all over the world." He was lighting a fresh cigar; there seemed to be a pause—almost a gap—in the tale. He got his cigar alight, and went on:)

I TOOK the bag of pearls off his body. I went back to the ship; everybody was asleep, and we sailed at sunup. I didn't see Zita till after breakfast next morning; she was sitting up in the bows, alongside the anchor-chains, well out of earshot of everyone. I reckoned she had heard something, and was waiting for me. So I went up to her, and keeping myself between her and the rest of the ship, I handed her the bag of pearls.

"All there," I said. And they were, because I'd bought the small ones back from Brock, the night before; he was very decent, and made me wholesale prices on the drinks. Zita took the pearls, and slipped them back into her dress, and I could see her breast heaving up and down, just the way the silver-white seas were heaving round the bow; it was one of those silver tropic days—but you wouldn't know. . . . And she said: "Thank God!"

But I said: "What about thanking me?"

She said: "How did you get them back?" And I knew by the flicker of her eyelids that she knew; it was all over the island, all over the New Hebrides group, as fast as the steamer went round.

So I said: "You needn't ask that, now or any time; only I'll say this: he didn't deserve to live."

She shook a little at that, and she said: "I can never—never thank you enough." And then she seemed to forget about herself for a minute, which women rarely do, and she said, suddenly: "But you—what'll happen to you?" She was seeing things then; the jail at Long

Bay, and a man walking with his arms tied and his eyes bandaged, three steps to eternity. I didn't answer her. Lomond came up to the bow just at that minute, and he said:

"So this is another of your lovers."

Like cold steel his voice was; and yet it was glad, inside. And I think he was seeing the same picture that she did, only he liked it. He didn't know about the pearls, nor just what Willis had so nearly done; he only knew there was jealousy between me and Willis, and I reckon he thought he was going to be rid of both in the best possible way.

I said nothing then, and I said nothing to him all the way back to Sydney. Zita and I saw something of each other, and I made up my mind that she was just the one woman, the one I'd been looking for—looking a bit too industriously, perhaps, all my life, which was twenty-eight years then, and it seemed older than I am now. She used to meet me after dinner, abaft the funnel, and we'd talk, in a hurry, with the wind shouting in the funnel-stays about us, and the engines stamping away below—*champity, champity*; I can hear 'em now. And see the stars, with the trucks of the masts going penciling through. Zita'd look at them with me, and I'd say: "I'll show you the stars in daylight, when we get to the gold-fields together." And she'd shake her head, but she'd come a bit closer, and say: "Tell me more." And once in a way, I'd see her eyes grow bigger and darker—though you'd think it was impossible—when she thought of what she wouldn't ever speak about; the chance of Long Bay and the little door in the morning.

BUT Lomond was thinking of the same thing, and sometimes he'd catch me alone, and say something that was meant to have a bite in it, or jerk the tie round his neck when he passed me in an alleyway, and grin. And so we got to Sydney, and came in through the Heads. You know how the harbor looks on a November morning, spring painting everything blue that isn't silver, and silver that isn't gold. And it was spring for me that day.

Lomond came up to me, when we were docking, with the ugliest grin you ever saw on a human countenance. They'd no wireless then, but he says: "I've had you signaled; the police will be on board as soon as the Customs or sooner, and there'll be an end," he says, "to your

lovemaking with my wife." He said it right where she could hear, and half the passengers too. Some of them looked scared—that was the few tourists we had; the others, why, they just burst out laughing. It's queer what things people will laugh at.

Now, that saying of his was just the last drop that filled the glass and overflowed it, or the last flake that started the avalanche; you can have it either way you like. Zita had been falling out of love with him ever since we left the islands, and to hear him call her down in public like that—and for something she hadn't done—finished the job. She looked at me, and I knew she was mine for the taking, only she was still a bit afraid—for me. The little door at eight o'clock in the morning, and the cap over the face. . . .

I wouldn't have missed the rest of it for anything; no, not even to have saved her some trouble. You'll see.

The gangway was out, but nobody could go ashore. "Captain's orders," was what the quartermaster said, sticking out his arm. We waited. And in about ten minutes, not hurrying themselves, came two police.

"What's this about?" one of 'em said, as they came up on deck. The captain said nothing. I don't know how much he—anyhow, he left it to Lomond, who was swelling out like something in a picture-show; and he says: "I charge this man"—meaning me—"with willful murder of Sydney Willis."

The two police got a little nearer to me. "Where did this alleged murder occur?" says one of 'em.

"In the New Hebrides, at Dugong Island," says Lomond.

"What have you to say about it?" the policeman asks me; but I noticed he was what you'd call a bit perfunctory, and the other man, who'd opened his notebook, quietly shut it up. "I don't need to say anything," I told him; "but if you want to know, I did kill a man who deserved to be killed about six times over, and I did it on territory that's outside the British Empire."

"You won't get off that way," Lomond said, with a kind of howl. "There's such a thing as law—foreign law. You can be—"

"The only law that runs in the New Hebrides," says I, "is the law of the head-hunters themselves. The French are squatting there, and so are we, but nobody owns the place; it's about the last

native-owned country in the world, and if you want to make a charge against me, you'd better do it through the cannibal chiefs of Dugong—if they don't eat you first. I think you'd be pretty safe, though," I said. "Even a Dugong cannibal might hesitate about swallowing *you*."

The second man put up his notebook. "We'll have it seen to," he said, but he looked just as a dog looks when you show him a bone, and then take it away. They knew there was going to be no sergeant's stripes for them, over that business.

I told Lomond where he could go, and how soon, and that he might get a divorce as quick as he liked, and say anything he chose; we wouldn't contradict him. So she went ashore without him, and I said good-by to her, for the time.

THE big cigar was out. Mitchell held it in two fingers, and looked at it thoughtfully, stroking the cold ash from its tip.

"She was with me," he said slowly, "on the Waria, and when the Lakekamu broke out. She went everywhere, and there never was a better-plucked one since God made women."

The story seemed to have ended. I sat up, and found words.

"But what happened? Did he die?"

"No."

"And she?"

He dived into another pocket, and pulled out a small photograph set in a case. "That's her," he said.

I looked, and saw a small group of men and women, standing under a palm-tree: Two doctors in white coats, two assistants of sorts, two nurses, in linen frocks and veils. You couldn't have told one woman from the other, and neither was beautiful.

"Nursing Sister Zita," Mitchell said. "Died on Bokolo, the leper island, four years ago."

"What, of—"

"No—heart-disease, they said." He looked at the dead tip of his cigar, and laid it down. "She wouldn't stick it, when she knew he'd do nothing."

He was yawning; he had suddenly tired of me. I found myself, I do not know how, out on the steps of the hotel.

The lights of Sydney splashed the sky. Trams were roaring past the Metropole down Bent Street; motors squawked. I plunged into the traffic; it seemed safe and homely; it seemed to welcome me.

On the Dotted Line



"IT'S that same young man," announced the pretty young secretary.

"Which same young man?" inquired Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor suspiciously.

"He's selling insurance," said Miss Granger, not without a hint of embarrassment, "and he's quite nice."

"Aaah!" Mr. Proctor gazed with interest upon the slightly flushed countenance. He asked: "Very nice?"

"Oh, very! Besides, you promised."

"You have no personal interest in him by any chance, have you?"

"Well, perhaps—"

"Humm! I thought you were keen for that Hartley chap—the one in our suburban-property department."

"Jim Hartley! He's just a big bully. Now, Mr. Jones—he's the young man who is waiting to see you—Mr. Jones is different. He's young and studious and ambitious—"

"I understand. Quite praiseworthy. But have you explained to him that I'm insured up to the hilt?"

"Yes sir, I told him that; but he insists he'd like to see you, anyway. He's

really very remarkable, Mr. Proctor; and you promised—"

Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor sighed deeply. "If I promised, I promised, Miss Granger. But it isn't any use. I'll buzz for you when I want him."

Miss Granger departed happily, and her portly employer gazed regretfully after her. That was the trouble with secretaries: if they were easy on the eyes, they were usually inefficient; when they were both beautiful and efficient, they inevitably ended their business careers at the altar. Mr. Proctor felt a sense of personal affront, but decided that there was nothing he could do about it. He was even curious to interview Mr. Jones, the dispenser of insurance: surely a most remarkable young man, to have aroused the housekeeping urge in so interesting a person as Miss Granger.

In the outer office Miss Granger was discussing matters with Mr. Jones. He was a young man, slender and alert. The fires of unquenchable ambition flashed in his blue eyes. Miss Granger was at present engaged in the task of preparing him for disappointment.



*An insurance sales-
man dares greatly,
suffers outrageously
—and achieves an
unexpected triumph.*

By **JOHN
VALENTINE**

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

"You see, Carl—he's already carrying a long line of insurance."

"That proves he's already insurance-conscious. I'll sell him some more if he'll only listen."

"He'll listen, all right. He promised, and he'll keep his word."

"That's all I ask. I'll write him for twenty thousand dollars."

Miss Granger was apprehensive. She said: "Aren't you too optimistic, Carl?"

"Optimism is my strong point."

"But twenty thousand dollars!"

"The sales-lessons all end that way, Alice. They tell you about the survey and then the approach, and finally the clinching arguments, and they always end with the words: 'And so the prospect was written for twenty thousand dollars.'"

"But those lessons were written by the insurance-company's sales manager. Perhaps he has used his imagination."

"Statistics," insisted Mr. Jones, "statistics and experience! I have as good as sold Mr. Proctor a twenty-thousand-dollar policy."

The buzzer sounded thrice. Miss Granger sighed: "I hope your company is not expecting—"

"They're looking to me for results."

"I loaned him my pen to sign the application, Your Honor, and he splattered me with ink. That fellow Hartley started toward me, and I socked him. Yes, Your Honor, I socked him in the nose."

She squeezed his hand. "Good luck, Carl! Remember, no matter how it comes out—I adore you."

Carl Jones grabbed his brief-case, adjusted his tie, flashed a triumphant glance at the scowling face of his rival—the very hefty Mr. Hartley—and followed Miss Granger to the door marked *Private*. Then he entered Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor's impressive sanctum.

Carl Jones was frankly overawed. Only recently had he been graduated from the ranks of apprentice salesmen; only this week had he been entrusted with the task of interviewing important prospects. A twenty-thousand-dollar policy was the minimum with which Carl proposed to let Mr. Proctor escape.

Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor nodded in kindly fashion to the young man who so seriously had intrigued Alice Granger's fancy. He motioned to a chair, but Carl paid no attention to the invitation. He planted himself firmly, cleared his throat

and stared—respectfully but courageously—into the eyes of his prospect.

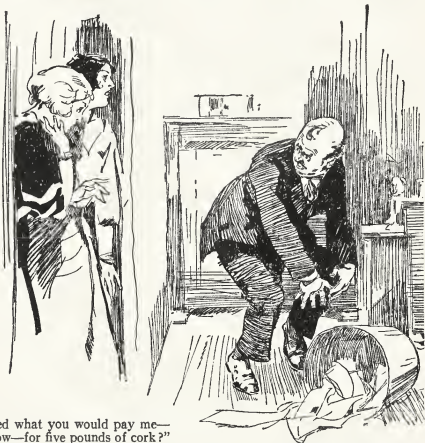
"Mr. Proctor," he said without preamble, "what would you pay for five pounds of cork?"

Mr. Proctor blinked. He said: "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It's a very simple question, Mr. Proc-

"I see. But I already have plenty of insurance."

Mr. Jones was now fairly launched. He seated himself opposite Mr. Proctor at the big desk, and produced pencil and paper. He used the former to sketch rather violently upon the latter. He exhibited his handiwork with some pride.



tor. I asked what you would pay me—here and now—for five pounds of cork?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Proctor somewhat shortly. "Absolutely nothing."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want any cork. I don't need any cork."

"Exactly!" There was triumph in the young man's manner. "But answer me this, Mr. Proctor: If you were drowning in a river, lake or ocean—what would you then pay for five pounds of cork? The answer—you need not give it—is that you would pay every cent you own. Now, Mr. Proctor, that goes for insurance. Today you are alive and well and need none. Tomorrow you will be ill—drowning, so to speak, in a river, lake or ocean. Then you will be unable to buy the cork—the insurance—which today is obtainable. Buy it today, Mr. Proctor, and keep it until you need it."

"Do you know what that is, Mr. Proctor?"

"A dog?" inquired the capitalist politely.

"A baby! A young, innocent, unprotected baby. Now, Mr. Proctor, what would your baby do if you were to die tonight?"

"I have no baby. I'm a single man."

"You might marry and have one. Any day. And what would he do—or she?"

"Isn't that a little previous, Mr. Jones? And I'm very busy."

"So am I. I'm busy trying to convert you to the theory of insurance—plenty of insurance." The young man was again engaged in extemporaneous art. "Aren't you going to ask me what this is?"

"If you wish."

"What does it look like?"

"Another baby?"

"This is a house, Mr. Proctor. It is your house; your home, your domain, your castle, and—"

"I haven't any house. I'm living in a hotel. I'm a very busy man, Mr. Jones. I granted you this interview at the request of Miss Granger, and—"

"I understand, but I have a few more questions to ask." Mr. Jones' mind was racing back through his lessons in sales-

one thing, young man—and that is that you are apparently determined never to go. I do not wish to be impolite, but I must ask you to leave immediately."

"He who hesitates is lost, Mr. Proctor."

"You had better not hesitate about leaving, Mr. Jones."

"I came here to do you a favor. Do you realize that today is your only certain day?"

"Will you get out of this office? I'm losing control of myself."



Mr. Proctor essayed to intervene, and received a sound kick in the shins. . . . It was a grand fight. Miss Granger screamed, and some one rushed to call a policeman.

manship: "Do you know that procrastination is the thief of time?"

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"It means you should act immediately. You should take time by the forelock and provide for your old age and those who will eventually mourn your passing. It's as the book says: 'Our days on earth are but a shadow.'"

"What book?" Mr. Proctor growled.

"My insurance-salesman's book. It says also that the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

"I'm not interested."

"But Mr. Proctor, do you realize that tomorrow may never come?"

Mr. Proctor rose. His face was flushed, and he was trembling. "I realize only

"Never put off till tomorrow—"

"Get out!"

"Mr. Proctor, one of my early lessons contained a line which I shall repeat to you: 'By the streets of By-and-by one arrives at the house of Never.' Isn't that impressive?"

Mr. Proctor seemed to be approaching an apoplectic state. "If you don't get out of this office, Mr. Jones, I shall have you thrown out."

"I'm seeking to help you."

"I don't need help. I won't have it!"

"Good intentions," declaimed Carl, "not carried out, have no cash value, pay no bills and feed no children."

"You're an infernal nuisance, Mr. Jones. I'm sorry I ever let you in here."

"Control yourself, Mr. Proctor. Re-

member that you can borrow the premium necessary to buy this insurance, but you can never borrow the health necessary to get it. Furthermore, a penny saved is a penny earned, and again: 'You do not now hear the wolf which will howl at your door after your demise.'"

Carl Jones stared hopefully at his prospect. He felt that his future trembled in the balance. He had gunned with all his best axioms, but he had the appalling hunch that all was not as it should be.

If Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor was annoyed, Mr. Jones was even more peeved. Mr. Proctor persistently had returned incorrect answers to the sales-arguments. Being a firm believer in the truth of the printed word, Mr. Jones now felt a sense of irritation which was directed at Mr. Proctor. He even commenced to doubt that his venture would conclude with the sale of a twenty-thousand-dollar policy. In desperation, he essayed the final psychological touch. He produced an application-blank and a fountain pen. This letter he attempted to force into Mr. Proctor's hand.

"Sign right there, sir—right on the dotted line."

"I'm not buying any insurance, and I'm not talking to you any longer."

"You don't understand—"

"I understand that you're a blasted young fool."

"On that line, Mr. Proctor—"

MR. PROCTOR'S fingers closed around the pen, but he did not sign. Instead he flung the pen angrily across the room. In passing, a large drop of ink was ejected from the pen to decorate the bosom of Mr. Jones' freshly laundered shirt.

"That was not very polite," observed Carl.

"Polite be danged! Get out!"

"I must urge you—"

Mr. Proctor was overcome by emotion. He advanced and laid a heavy hand upon Mr. Jones' person. With this hand he attempted to propel the young salesman toward the door.

Now, Mr. Jones was not large, but he was full of pride and courage. Nowhere in his course had he received instructions on how to act when about to be flung out of an office, and he therefore fell back upon his instincts.

With unmistakable firmness he whipped himself free from the grasp of his stubborn prospect. He did this with more force than was necessary, and Mr. Proctor

staggered back against his desk and sent two books crashing to the floor.

Mr. Proctor uttered a howl. He fancied that he was about to be assaulted. He rushed to the door and yelled for Mr. Hartley of the suburban-property department. Other employees stared in amazement as Mr. Hartley bounded to the rescue. Miss Granger, the slim and beautiful and efficient young secretary, rose and moved toward the door. One glimpse of Mr. Proctor's distorted countenance, and she suspected that all was not well.

Mr. Hartley crossed the threshold. Mr. Proctor muttered things incoherently and waved toward Carl Jones. Mr. Hartley instantly grasped the idea that Mr. Jones was to be expelled without economy of force, and he advanced happily to the attack. In the doorway stood the stricken Miss Granger—helpless to avert the impending shambles.

Mr. Jones was crushed in spirit but not in the flesh. Mr. Proctor's reactions to sales-argument had been disconcertingly unorthodox. The prospect had not been written for twenty thousand dollars; instead, the prospect had summoned a despised rival to eject the ambitious young salesman.

Mr. Jones felt that he had been insulted and abused. Smaller than Mr. Hartley, he did not avoid combat. This was something outside the book: an intimate, personal and welcome affair; and Miss Granger in the doorway thrilled deliciously as Mr. Jones opened hostilities by planting a short right hook upon the very tip of Mr. Hartley's nose.

It was a merry battle for perhaps three minutes. Mr. Jones' sense of outrage found untrammelled outlet, and he fired at Mr. Hartley with all he possessed. Once Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor essayed to intervene, and received a sound kick in the shins from the embattled Mr. Jones.

It was a grand fight against overwhelming odds. Miss Granger screamed, and in the outer office, several other lady employees joined in the chorus. Some one rushed into the hall and commanded an elevator-boy to call a policeman. When the minion of the law arrived, Mr. Jones lay prostrate—whipped but not conquered, and still kicking heroically.

"Arrest him!" yelled Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor: "He's a madman! An assassin!"

The cop grabbed Mr. Jones. "Come along with me, young feller." Then, to Mr. Proctor: "What's the charge?"

"Assault! Assault and battery!"

The policeman made a few notes. "Be at police court at nine in the morning," he ordered, "—provided you want to press the charges."

"I hope he goes to the penitentiary. He's a public menace."

IN the clutches of the law, Mr. Jones emitted his last forlorn axiom from the doorway.

"Mr. Proctor," he said, "for the last time I urge you not to betray your wife and children by failing to purchase this insurance."

"I haven't any wife! I haven't any children! I don't want any insurance! And I hope you get ten years!"

Miss Granger followed her fiancé. Mr. Hartley repaired to the washroom for first aid. A gleeful friend dropped a key down his back, claiming that it was an infallible remedy for nosebleed. Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor collapsed into a chair and spluttered.

That night Mr. Jones occupied a cell. For two hours Miss Granger sat with him and attempted to console him. She called him a hero.

"That isn't the point," mourned Mr. Jones. "This episode has destroyed my confidence in myself. I did very well as a salesman until I met Mr. Proctor. He has destroyed something within me, and I could never now approach another prospect with full confidence that the book was right."

"But it was right, dear—and so were you. Mr. Proctor is just a mean old man."

"I'm afraid to report to the office, Alice. When I was leaving, the chief said: 'Twenty thousand, Jones—we're counting on you to write this prospect for twenty thousand.'"

"You did your best."

"In one way," agreed Mr. Jones, "I'm satisfied. Didn't I give Jim Hartley a grand sock in the nose?"

The following morning Mr. Jones faced a grim police judge. Miss Granger sat with him, to lend moral support. Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor was there too, and beside him was the stalwart but battered Jim Hartley. The case was called, and Mr. Proctor outlined to the judge the ordeal to which he had been subjected. He was very bitter about it—vitriolic, even; and when he finished his informal testimony, the judge called upon Carl Jones for a statement.

"Your Honor," said Carl with quiet

dignity, "some of what Mr. Proctor says is true—but the effect of it is untrue. He knew in advance that I was an insurance salesman, and permitted me to call upon him. My mission was one of charity: I was attempting to help him, to make him understand the virtue and necessity of protecting his loved ones from want, privation and misery."

"I told him, Your Honor, that procrastination was the thief of time, and that our days on earth are as but a shadow. I told him that only the passing moment was his, and that on the streets of By-and-By, one arrives at the house of Never. I made it clear that good intentions, not carried out, have no cash value, pay no bills and feed no children. I explained that he could borrow the premium necessary to buy this policy, but that he could never borrow the health necessary to get it, and I reminded him that in the prime of life he could not hear the wolf which will howl at the door of his destitute family after his demise."

"I was seeking to save his family from destitution, Your Honor. I drew a picture of his baby,—the baby he may some day become the father of,—and asked him to consider that poor, fatherless child. I drew a picture of a house, and inquired what his family would do with that home, should he suddenly meet with a somewhat fatal accident. I loaned him my pen with which to sign the application, Your Honor, and he splattered me with ink. Here it is, on my best shirt. He grabbed my arm and yelled for assistance. That man came—that fellow Hartley. He started toward me, and I socked him. Yes, Your Honor, I socked him right square in the nose."

The judge glowered at Mr. Carlsen B. Proctor.

"Is this young man's story true?"

"Yes. He was a nuisance—"

"Case dismissed!" snapped the judge. Then he leaned forward and addressed Carl Jones: "May I see you in my private office for a moment, young man?"

MISS GRANGER waited for thirty anxious minutes. Then the door opened and Carl Jones appeared. He grabbed Miss Granger's arm and propelled her into the corridor.

"The book was right!" he exulted.

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand," confessed Miss Granger.

"The judge!" enthused Mr. Jones. "I just wrote the judge for twenty thousand dollars!"

Miracle in



A fascinating novelette detailing the greatest adventure of the Intelligence officer who was known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

A DISGUSTING business," shivered Eustace Adam.

Paul Rodgers—a roving Intelligence officer known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia—agreed.

"And queer," he added.

They stood in a room in a little wooden house in Jidda and stared at the floor. But whereas Eustace Adam stared with the fixity of horror, the gray eyes of Red Rodgers narrowed with thought.

Stretched before them was the body of an Arab girl. She had been strangled. A black scarf was twisted tightly round her neck. And a few yards away lay the body of a white man. He had been strangled in similar fashion.

"A disgusting business," repeated Eustace Adam, who in his capacity as political resident at Jidda for the ruling sheik, had been called to this house by a khaki-clad Arab policeman.

the Desert

"Who was he?" asked Rodgers, indicating the prone body of the white man.

"An Italian—a shipping clerk," jerked out Adam. "Bought coffee and skins, as an agent. Had him to dinner once. Not a bad young fellow. Only he greased his hair and created an aurora of perfume about himself. Still, one needs perfume in Jidda."

"And the woman?"

Rodgers' gaze had traveled toward the other body. Most Arab women are born to but a year's beauty—one Cinderella year of grace, and then they are changed into bent crones. He could see, despite the agony of the features, that this Arab girl had been in the full flush of beauty.

"Who can say?" Eustace Adam was saying with a shrug of his shoulders. "It is obvious that she lived here, with her Italian lover—"

He indicated several gorgeous yellow silk petticoats, a medley of silk stockings, and five pairs of high-heel shoes.

"For an Arab girl, she had decidedly civilized tastes," he added.

Paul Rodgers stroked the back of his flaming red head with a thoughtful gesture.

"Yes; and perhaps that was the cause of her death," he murmured.

"You think that the girl's beauty—" began Adam.

Rodgers nodded.

"It is unwise for an Arab girl to give

herself to a white man—in Arabia," he said. "And this girl belongs to the Koreysh nomads. Look!"

With a sudden movement he twisted the limp arm so that Adam glimpsed a queer Arabic sign tattooed in the flesh.

"So it is purely a crime of vengeance, eh?" said Adam, turning away from that sight. "Her brothers came in the night, strangled both, and so wiped out the insult to their blood."

"Such is the law of the desert," mused Rodgers.

He walked slowly across the little room and took hold of one of the silk stockings that were dangling limply from a cord stretched across a corner. His fingers smoothed the sheeny surface.

"Beautiful, desirable silk stockings," he murmured half to himself. "No wonder women adore them! No wonder this Arab girl ran away from the tents of the desert in order to possess them, together with her Italian lover. Beautiful indeed, and yet—sinister. They might easily have been used to strangle these lovers." He walked back and examined the black scarf twisted round the girl's neck. "Why should the thugs of the desert prefer these two strips of black cloth?"

"There's something funereal in the color," shivered Adam. "Isn't there a black silk stocking in that collection dangling against the wall?"

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

Illustrated by John Clymer



"Peace be upon you, men of the black mantles," murmured a voice of commanding tone. At sound of the voice they prostrated themselves.

"Not a single black one," replied Rodgers. "All bright pink or flesh-colored, my dear Eustace. The dream stockings of every native woman east of Suez."

The political resident shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what does it matter?" he said. "The poor devils are dead, and I expect half the Italian colony across the Red Sea will be yelling for justice within the next twenty-four hours."

He went to the door of the room, leaned over the rickety staircase and called out in Arabic. A few moments later the khaki-clad policeman stood beside him. Instructions were given, and with a sigh of relief Eustace Adam walked to the door.

"Coming, Rodgers?" he called out.

"Er—of course," replied Red Rodgers absently.

"*SANTA DIAVOLONE!* I expect something to be done," spluttered the perspiring Italian.

Francesco Grazzini, patriotically clad in a black shirt in defiance of the devastating heat, argued before Eustace Adam. The political resident, seated at his desk, lit a cigarette in despair. In the shadows of the big room that constituted an office, Red Rodgers loafed listlessly.

"What is there that can be done, my dear Grazzini?" asked Eustace Adam.

The Italian snorted.

"My brilliant young assistant, dear Giovanni Bottari, has been murdered. A young man on the verge of a great career, strangled by some cursed Arabs! And you ask me what can be done. *Santa diavolone!* I want justice."

Adam blew a little cloud of cigarette smoke into the air.

"No man demands justice in vain in the country of the Hedjaz, my dear Grazzini," he replied. "Justice is for every man, as our ruling sheik has said, be he European or Arab."

"Then why not—" began the Italian.

The political resident raised his hand.

"Justice can be exercised by every man," he went on calmly. "It is his right. The law is clear. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' In the Hedjaz, a blood feud is permitted. It is easy enough to discover the Arabs who murdered your assistant. You need to look no further than the relatives of the Arab girl who was strangled with her lover. Let the relatives or friends of the murdered Giovanni ride into the desert and

attack the Koreysh nomads. They are probably expecting such a duel. It is the law of Arabia."

Again the Italian snorted.

"Do you expect me to ride into the desert, with a rifle under my arm, in order to find the Arab who killed Giovanni?"

"Such is the custom of the Hedjaz," remarked Eustace Adam.

"And if I do not?"

"Then it would seem that you are not so anxious for justice, and the blood feud will end."

The Italian perspired more freely than ever.

"My poor Giovanni!" he cried. "Why did you go among those cursed desert nomads to buy skins? And because you pluck a desert flower, death is upon you. —*Signor!*" He turned in a blaze of fury upon the political resident. "It is incredible, unbelievable, that murder should be done against one of the Black-shirts, and that the murderer should escape our vengeance. Il Duce himself shall be informed, and—"

"But he did not wear a black shirt," drawled a voice from the shadows.

With a twist of his ungainly body, the Italian faced the voice. It came from Paul Rodgers. The sunburnt face and gray eyes had assumed a mask of indifference.

"Giovanni Bottari was one of the leaders of the Fascisti," spluttered the Italian proudly. "In our colony of Eritrea, he had organized and drilled the Black Shirts. Such a murder would not go unpunished on our side of the Red Sea."

"And yet, I repeat, he never wore a black shirt," drawled Paul Rodger.

"*Santa diavolone!* But how do you know?"

"Because I searched the room and his wardrobe," said Rodgers. "Neither Giovanni nor the Arab girl who died with him had a single black garment between them. And yet a black scarf strangled each. Queer, isn't it?"

Eustace Adam flung away his cigarette impatiently.

"I see nothing queer in it. After all, why should anyone wear black in this damned climate?"

"The Fascisti, signor, are proud to wear black," said the Italian, mopping his swarthy face with a black handkerchief.

"Exactly," murmured Rodgers. "And yet young Giovanni, the leader of the Fascisti, would not wear a black shirt in Jidda."

The Italian regarded Rodgers thoughtfully.

"It is true, what you say, signor," he admitted with a sigh. "From the moment that Giovanni returned from trading with those Arab nomads, he sent all his black shirts back to Eritrea. I asked him only three days ago why he had done this. He shuddered, and said something about it not being wise to wear black in Jidda. Faithful Fascist though he was, he would not have black colors anywhere in his house. He tried even to persuade me to discard my black shirt. He seemed to have developed a fear of anything black. 'Black,' he said, 'is the color of death.'"

"And with a strip of black cloth he was strangled," mused Rodgers.

He leaned forth from the shadows, his keen face alert. The gray eyes searched the doorway. An Arab, garbed in a black mantle, had entered as silently as a cat. He ignored the Italian but bowed low before Eustace Adam. In his strong brown paw he presented a document scrawled fantastically in Arabic. The political resident seemed to welcome this intrusion upon a painful interview.

"Have you gathered your men together, Bedr Basim?" he asked.

The Arab in the black mantle nodded.

"They are ready, master, to march into the desert tonight."

"How many?"

"Two hundred."

"Good."

Eustace Adam took the document, glanced idly at it, and then scrawled his signature in Arabic at the foot.

"That will pass you safely through the tribes to the diggings," he said.

"Thank you, master. May Allah protect you!"

"And you, Bedr Basim."

A swift genuflection, and the Arab in the black mantle sidled out of the room in the same stealthy fashion that he had entered.

IN the short silence that followed, Eustace Adam took the opportunity of lighting another cigarette.

"I am afraid, my dear Grazzini, that I cannot do anything more," he said. "If a European enters upon an amour with an Arab girl, he must accept the consequences. Such is the law of the Hedjaz."

Francesco Grazzini bowed his head.

"I understand, signor," he replied. "I thank you for this interview. But I re-

turn to Italian soil profoundly dissatisfied. Good day."

And tilting a big black hat over his perspiring head, he marched out into the sunshine.

Paul Rodgers regarded his departure thoughtfully.

"I feel sorry for him," he murmured.

"So do I," admitted Eustace Adam. "But this is Arab country, and Arab law prevails. . . . And now I must report to my master the sheik."

His hand reached forth and drew a telephone toward him. A moment's pause; and then:

"Give me Mecca—One," he demanded in Arabic.

At the same time he turned a smiling face to the slim sunburnt figure at his side.

"Such is the holy Hedjaz of today," he murmured. "I can telephone to the Sheik in Mecca, talk to him, and hear the gossip of the holiest of all cities. The city that Burton and other Christians visited with their lives in their hands, is nowadays as easy of telephone access as, shall we say, Hampstead."

"Easier, I am certain," murmured Rodgers.

"Over this telephone," went on Eustace Adam, "Lawrence of Arabia first spoke to Sheik Hussein and arranged for that great upheaval that led to the freedom of Arabia from the Turk. Over this same telephone went curt orders to Hussein to abdicate his throne. It was the end of his régime. And now—"

"Now you are going to tell the story of a sordid murder of an Italian and the Arab girl who loved him, eh?"

There was irony in the voice of Rodgers; but it was lost, for Eustace Adam was already speaking to the Sheik. The long rhetorical roll of Arabic continued, while Rodgers paced the office with the restless padding of a caged panther.

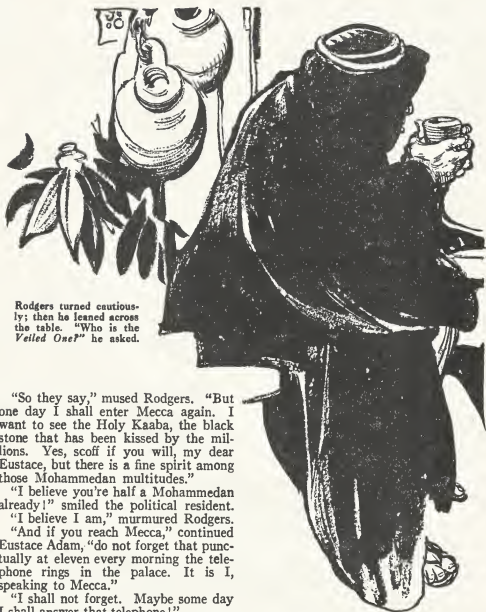
At length Adam put back the telephone.

"So much for Mecca!" he concluded.

"Have you ever ventured into the holy city?" asked Rodgers.

Eustace Adam shook his head and smiled.

"No, and I really have no desire to join that band of Christian pilgrims who have entered the city. I know enough of Mecca to realize that it is dirty, diseased, and no doubt dismally unattractive. If one must be a pilgrim, why not Moscow? Isn't it more important nowadays than Mecca?"



Rodgers turned cautiously; then he leaned across the table. "Who is the Veiled One?" he asked.

"So they say," mused Rodgers. "But one day I shall enter Mecca again. I want to see the Holy Kaaba, the black stone that has been kissed by the millions. Yes, scoff if you will, my dear Eustace, but there is a fine spirit among those Mohammedan multitudes."

"I believe you're half a Mohammedan already!" smiled the political resident.

"I believe I am," murmured Rodgers.

"And if you reach Mecca," continued Eustace Adam, "do not forget that punctually at eleven every morning the telephone rings in the palace. It is I, speaking to Mecca."

"I shall not forget. Maybe some day I shall answer that telephone!"

"If you do, I shall know that you are doomed never to leave Mecca alive. . . . And now, my dear Paul, what about strolling back to my house and playing the piano?"

"You like my playing?" asked Rodgers. . . . "By the way, what did that Arab in the black mantle want?"

"You mean Bedr Basim?"

Rodgers nodded.

"He's taking two hundred men to the diggings. I signed the *laissez-passer*."

"So I gathered. But what diggings?"

"Haven't you heard? There's an archaeologist fellow in the desert who has discovered the tomb of the Caliph Mo-

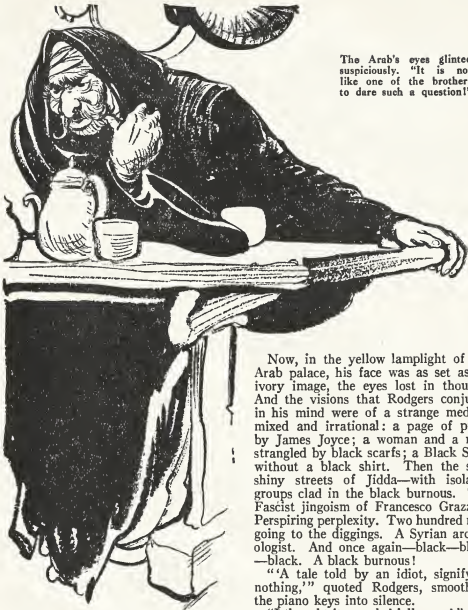
hammad Mahdi. He's clearing away the sand, and has asked me for more workers. Bedr Basim is taking them away tonight."

"Interesting. The tomb of a caliph, eh?" Rodgers stood in the doorway, musing. "And who is this energetic archaeologist?"

"He is a Syrian. For the moment I forget his name. Selim, I believe."

Rodgers laughed. "A Syrian archaeologist, eh?"

And they did not speak again until they had reached the crazy Arab palace in which Eustace Adam lived.



The Arab's eyes glinted suspiciously. "It is not like one of the brothers to dare such a question!"

IT was while his fingers strayed idly over the keys of the piano in a Debussy fantasy that the mind of Paul Rodgers conned the events of the day. Music always stimulated his mental powers. He was apt to argue that music was a pure science, developed even beyond the abstruse realm of mathematics. That is why he was often contemptuous of romantic melodies. "No good music was ever composed by the heart," he declared. "Tin Pan Alley is the place for such musicians. There, hearts are worn on sleeves, and 'red-hot mammas' dance like dervishes at the sight."

Now, in the yellow lamplight of the Arab palace, his face was as set as an ivory image, the eyes lost in thought. And the visions that Rodgers conjured in his mind were of a strange medley, mixed and irrational: a page of prose by James Joyce; a woman and a man strangled by black scarfs; a Black Shirt without a black shirt. Then the sunshiny streets of Jidda—with isolated groups clad in the black burnous. The Fascist jingoism of Francesco Grazzini. Perspiring perplexity. Two hundred men going to the diggings. A Syrian archaeologist. And once again—black—black—black. A black burnous!

"A tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing," quoted Rodgers, smoothing the piano keys into silence.

"I thought it sounded jolly good," said Eustace Adam.

"Have you ever read 'The Arabian Nights?'" asked Rodgers, swinging round in his chair.

Eustace Adam nodded.

"I spent three weeks, when I was up at Oxford, reading Burton's translation."

"One of the vices of Edwardian undergraduates," smiled Rodgers. "Seriously, though, I would argue that all administrators, proconsuls, viceroys and the gilded intelligentsia who are sent out from Britain to do a job of work east of Suez should make 'The Arabian Nights' their Bible."

"I agree," nodded Eustace Adam.

"It is the greatest revelation of the Oriental mind ever compiled," went on Rodgers. "But there is one story that even the versatile Scheherazade forgot."

"And that is?"

"The story of the Caliph Mohammad Mahdi."

"The man whose tomb has just been discovered?"

Rodgers nodded.

"Wasn't he the caliph who ruled Bagdad before Haroun al Raschid?" asked the political resident.

AGAIN Rodgers nodded. "The rule of Mohammad Mahdi, like that of most caliphs, was one of blood and tyranny. The worst tortures of the Inquisition pale into insignificance compared with the subtle punishments devised by those who were descendants of the Holy Prophet.

"Many men hated the Caliph. Like all tyrants, he had enemies. But they were scattered. They lurked in single spies among the beggars of Bagdad. Until, one day, a usurper arose. He called upon the faithful to overthrow the tyrant. He lurked in the byways of Bagdad, whispered his creed, was acclaimed, and soon gathered about him a strange army. It was a gospel preached in the gutter, and it was a gutter crowd that surrounded the usurper. They shouted their song of revolt in the cellars of Bagdad. You remember Flecker:

*"Cracked of lip and gapped of tooth,
Apoplectic, maim or mad,
Blind of one eye, blind of both,
Up, the beggars of Bagdad."*

"I think that trifle by Debussy that you were playing is more exhilarating," broke in Eustace Adam, blowing the smoke of his cigarette into spirals.

"A strange man, this usurper," went on Rodgers quietly. "Alive, no one ever saw his face. Always he appeared before his followers wearing a mask and a black mantle. A black mantle! Strange, eh?"

"And his name?"

"No one ever knew. Throughout Arabia he was called the *Veiled One*."

"Rather smacks of Lyceum melodrama," murmured the political resident. He was beginning to be a little impatient of this strange vagrant of the Red Sea, Paul Rodgers, mystery man, an enigma even to his friends.

"But the Caliph was no fool," went on that quiet voice. "His spies heard whispers in the bazaar, and those whispers reached the Caliph. He determined

to strike at once. A raid was made upon the byways of Bagdad. At all costs the *Veiled One* must be found and killed. But the usurper escaped into the desert. The Caliph's men returned with blood-stained swords, but the chief culprit was still alive.

"An army of men on fast racing-camels set out the next day. They raced the sun in a desperate chase after the *Veiled One*. And at last, after some days, they ran him down. He was still wearing his mask and black burnous. As he saw the Caliph's men advancing over the wastes of sand, he visualized the seven merciless torments that would rack his body if he were taken alive back to Bagdad. He did not hesitate. His dagger gleamed in the sunshine, and with his own hand he killed himself. His blood was staining the sand as the Caliph's men raced up. They cut off his head, still with the mask over the face, and carried it back to Bagdad."

"A story worthy of the 'Arabian Nights,'" said the political resident.

"It is written in the history of the caliphs," observed Rodgers. "A book, my dear Eustace, much more sanguinary than Fox's 'Book of Martyrs.'"

"So I should imagine," growled the other, clapping his hands in command. An Arab servant made his appearance with a little tray of drinks. Rodgers took the lime and gin that was offered him.

"But the story is not yet finished," went on Paul Rodgers.

"When the head was brought before the Caliph, he laughed at it. A head with a mask! Even his soldiers had not dared to tear it away. But the descendant of the Holy Prophet had no such qualms. He reached out a firm brown hand and tore that strip of black stuff away. And the the eyes of the dead man and the live man stared into each other.

"A terrible silence had descended upon the palace. Slowly the Caliph rose. He still stared into those awful eyes set in the sun-withered head. Then he tore the silence with a scream. He yelled his horror, his disgust, his madness. And he leaned over toward the head and spat at it, between the eyes. After which, laughing loudly, he staggered away. The head seemed to watch this madness with a calm gravity."

"What happened to the head?" asked Eustace Adam.

"Some one threw it out of a cart at night into the byways of Bagdad. It

rolled into the gutter—and disappeared. But the Caliph Mohammad Mahdi declared that the head still lived, that it haunted him in his palace. He could not escape it. He locked himself into rooms. That sun-withered head with the staring eyes followed him everywhere. He awoke in the night, sweating with fear, to find the grisly thing watching him with calm gravity. Even in the arms of houis he could not forget it. Once, as the pomegranate lips of a Persian girl were raised toward him, he found himself kissing the bloodless sun-withered thing that had once been the usurper. He seized the sword of one of his guards, and slashed madly at it. The Persian girl was hewn to the ground.

"The end came soon. The gibbering, tortured man who called himself Caliph and descended from the Holy Prophet, died. He had asked that his tomb might be built secretly, far away from Bagdad and in the heart of the Arabian desert. He had the fear that the cursed head would haunt him even in death. And that fear proved true. For when the burial party entered the secret tomb in the desert, carrying the body of the great Caliph, they saw with horror that the tomb was already occupied. Lying in a corner was a headless skeleton. Not one of those men was brave enough to disturb the bones. Terror-stricken, they thrust the body of the Caliph into its appointed place, sealed the tomb, and decamped to Bagdad. Time and the sands did the rest. In five years the tomb was lost. And no one ever saw the sun-withered head of the usurper again. But the Arabs believe that it is still haunting the Caliph in the awful loneliness of that lost tomb in the desert."

A short silence followed the telling of the story by Rodgers.

"And that is the tomb which is now found again, eh?" asked Eustace Adam.

"So it is claimed," murmured Rodgers. "By a Syrian, didn't you say?"

Eustace nodded. "Why don't you visit the diggings, my dear Paul?" he asked.

Rodgers rose slowly from his chair.

"Maybe I will," he said, quietly.

HALF an hour later there was a transformation. Clad in a black burnous and looking the real Hedjaz Arab to the life, Paul Rodgers stalked through the sunshine of the streets of Jidda.

He carried himself proudly. Solemn Arab children at play skipped away at

his approach. A leper, whose one arm seemed always outstretched for alms, raised it in reverent salute at the passing of the slim figure in the black burnous. Three men emerging from a mosque, hand in hand in Arab fashion, bowed deeply as he went by.

"There is a mystery in this black mantle," mused Rodgers, gazing down at the dyed stuff that enfolded him. "Maybe it shrouds the reasons for the murder of a black-shirt Italian and an Arab girl."

With an air he sat himself in the dusty and fly-blown atmosphere of a coffee-house. Many Arabs were there, talking of religion or politics with a fervor that was reminiscent of the coffee-houses of Eighteenth Century Europe. But one subject the Arabs did not discuss—woman. This subject was as scrupulously ignored as it would be in the mosque.

The cynosure of many eyes, Rodgers sipped his perfumed coffee and waited. Something might happen. . . . Something did happen: a shadow crossed his table. He looked up. Standing at his side was a replica of himself, a proud-bearing Arab in a black burnous.

"Allah is great," murmured the standing figure.

"Allah is all-powerful," mechanically repeated Rodgers.

"You are one of us, brother?"

"I entered Jidda only this afternoon," replied Rodgers. "But as you see,"—and he smoothed the black burnous that clothed him,—"I am one of the black mantles."

The aloofness of the other disappeared. He sank into a chair at the same table.

"By the Prophet," he murmured, "but you have come to Jidda at the right moment. This evening there is a meeting of the faithful at the house of Bedr Basim."

"I had heard of it," said Rodgers.

"They say that the *Veiled One* has appeared and is calling upon the faithful to begin the holy war against those who desecrate the tombs of Mecca."

"Speak softly, brother," urged Rodgers, entering blithely into this atmosphere of conspiracy.

The other glanced round nervously, then laughed.

"Nearly all in Jidda are with us," he remarked. "Have you not heard that two hundred men are marching into the desert tonight? They are to be provided with camels and rifles, and will meet the *Veiled One* at the 'diggings.'"

Rodgers turned his head cautiously. Then he leaned across the table to the other.

"Who is the *Veiled One*?" he asked quietly.

The Arab in the black mantle drew in his breath sharply. His eyes glinted suspiciously.

"It is not like one of the brothers to dare such a question," he murmured.

Red Rodgers drained his little cup of coffee. He licked his lips appreciatively, and said:

"I give all for the cause. The fame of the *Veiled One* is whispered throughout the desert. By Allah, I believe in him. But my eyes have not seen him. Perchance, brother, you have been more fortunate?"

The other's suspicions were lulled.

"Nay, I have not set eyes on the *Veiled One*. His face hides behind a black mask. And he has assumed the holy garment of the black mantle. But those hundreds already gathered on the 'diggings' saw the miracle as it happened in the fierce sunshine of day. He walked forth from the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi, and called the faithful to prepare for the liberation of the Holy Kaaba at Mecca. A miracle in the desert, brother."

"A miracle indeed."

"And a great cause. One worthy of sharp swords and merciless men. It is the *Veiled One* who will lead the black mantles to the attack on Mecca."

"And he stepped forth from the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi," mused Rodgers.

The tall Arab rose.

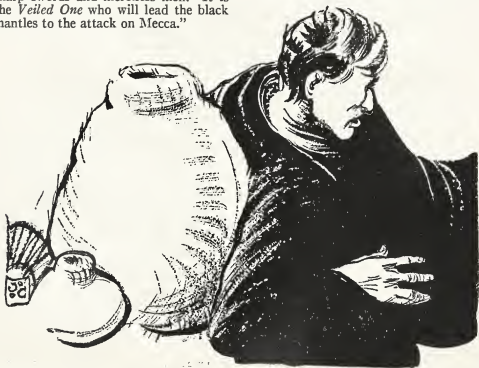
"But we waste time, brother, in talk. We should be on our way to the house of Bedr Basim. Shall we go together?"

A strong brown finger entwined itself in his own. It was an Arab command. Without hesitation Rodgers also rose. He flung a coin on the table.

"We go together, brother," he murmured; and hand in hand the two wandered away from the coffee-house.

THE swift darkness of the desert had already stretched over Jidda as Red Rodgers and the tall Arab entered a narrow, reeking street that was less than two hundred yards away from that palace where Eustace Adam, the political officer, was lying nude and comfortable in a tepid bath.

As Rodgers stumbled into the darkness of this living drain, he was aware that formless shadows were crowding upon him. Some one brushed against him. Then he realized that he was surrounded by men in black mantles. They came in twos and threes, hand in hand, slinking silently as rats. And like rats they nosed for the hole in the wall into which they disappeared. The strong hand of his companion guided Red Rodgers toward that same hole in the wall. Wrap-





"No one shall look upon my face and live. And I am now going to unveil myself before you."

ping his black burnous about him, he plunged forward. He was in the house of Bedr Basim.

A few minutes later, as he squatted in a huge room among other Arabs, he glanced round stealthily from the cover of his black hood. It was a low, white-walled chamber lit brilliantly by forty candles. The candles burned steadily in an atmosphere like an oven. And crouched in a semicircle were some forty Arabs all garbed in black mantles. Like a nightmare vision, thought the Intelligence officer as he craned forward. Forty candles dribbling white wax, forty Arabian black mantles; and—his gray eyes widened in astonishment—a gorgeous white carpet six feet square, in the center of which rested a blood-red pomegranate.

Not one of those black-mantled figures encroached upon the silky white surface of the carpet. And the blood-red pomegranate lay in the center as though some playful child had thrown it there. Nevertheless all eyes were fixed on that pomegranate.

Suddenly, through the brilliant haze of the forty burning candles, stepped a figure in a black mantle. There was a masterful arrogance in his pose. It was a few seconds before Rodgers realized that this was the cringing figure who a few hours previously had entered the office of Eustace Adam and received a signed *laissez-passer* for two hundred men to proceed to the diggings. It was Bedr Basim.

Bedr Basim held aloft a brown paw.

"Peace be upon you!" he cried.

"And upon you be peace and the mercy of God and His blessings," rejoined the forty black mantles.

Bedr Basim seated himself with the air of a sheik on a pile of cushions facing the white carpet and the semicircle of Arabs in black mantles. His eyes ranged slowly over the faces of those forty men. Rodgers waited. For an instant the eyes rested upon him. He seemed to lose himself in their black depths for an interminable period. Then they seemed to narrow in suspicion. The next moment they passed on. Rodgers' moist hand loosened its hold upon the revolver that he carried beneath his black burnous.

Apparently satisfied, Bedr Basim threw back his head.

"O Allah, bless our great cause!" he chanted.

"And sharpen our swords against the infidels," growled the black mantles.

"O Allah, send us victory!" chanted Bedr Basim, his eyes glittering ecstatically.

"And may the blood of unbelievers run in the streets of Mecca!" responded the black mantles.

"Allah is great."

"Allah is all-powerful."

A short silence followed. In that hot, sweaty atmosphere, the forty wax candles guttered fantastically. And together with Bedr Basim forty hooded heads were bowed. . . .

Bedr Basim raised his head. Throwing back the hood of his burnous, he revealed the glittering eyes and sloping brow of the religious fanatic. His words tumbled forth in hot excitement.

"The time has come, brothers, when we must draw our swords for the cause. The *Veiled One*"—and here the black mantles bowed their heads—"awaits his army of true believers. Nearly a thousand men are gathered at the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi. They are ready to fight for the true Caliph, the *Veiled One*, who will purge Mecca and the holy places of idolaters and infidels. Two hundred men leave Jidda tonight. This is the last caravan. Once it arrives at the 'diggings,' the advance begins. In two hours, my brothers, we leave. Are you, the black mantles, ready for the journey?"

"By Allah, we are ready!" growled the forty voices.

"Our swords are sharp, our daggers are keen," shouted one Arab.

Bedr Basim flashed a scornful glance in his direction.

"There are rifles, aye, and machine-guns, hidden away at the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi," he said. "They kill the infidels quicker than swords."

"By Allah, we shall be victorious," growled the black mantles.

Again Bedr Basim raised his brown paw. Silence smothered the room. Then the hand descended, and a figure pointed to the blood-red pomegranate in the center of that white carpet.

"Behold! The holy city—Mecca!"

His finger pointed to the pomegranate.

"And behold, the surrounding country, the Hedjaz!"

Both hands indicated the white carpet.

"The problem is before you, brothers of the black mantle," he went on. "How to take the pomegranate, without stepping on the carpet? He who solves the problem shall have the blessing of the *Veiled One* himself!"

An awed silence followed these words. Once again forty pairs of eyes leveled themselves at the solitary pomegranate. Whispers began to mix with the smoke of the candles.

"Is there no one among you with wits above a camel?" asked Bedr Basim.

One Arab in a black mantle stepped forth. He stood on the edge of the silky white carpet and considered the pomegranate.

"Our prize—the holy city," encouraged Bedr Basim.

The Arab threw himself to the ground at the edge of the carpet. Then he stretched forth a lean brown arm above the white surface. He extended his fingers. But the blood-red pomegranate was out of his reach.

Undeterred, he rose to his feet and tried from another edge of the carpet. But still the pomegranate was far from his reach, and he dared not go closer to that spotless white carpet.

"Mecca is all that we want," murmured Bedr Basim, regarding the reaching figure gravely.

The Arab gave it up. Another stepped forth. He also was appalled at that white silky surface. The whispers had now become a gabble. Then the gabble died like sand silting after a storm. Red Rodgers in his black mantle stood before the arrogant Bedr Basim.

"The problem is simple, brother!"

"So?"

There was an ironic gleam in the black glittering eyes now fixed upon Paul Rodgers. But with an innate, superb artistry, the Red Wolf of Arabia felt sure of himself. In the glittering light of those forty candles he knew that his Arab disguise was safe. For he instinctively thought and acted as an Arab.

"Mecca and the Holy Kaaba," said he, pointing a brown finger at the pomegranate, "awaits the *Veiled One*. That is so, eh?"

"It is so."

"Then the problem is easily solved." He knelt at the edge of the white carpet. He inserted his hands beneath the white silky surface and slowly began to roll the carpet toward the pomegranate. As he went forward inch by inch, the black mantles watched him. Finally he reached the pomegranate.

"Take the villages surrounding the holy city," said Red Rodgers, "and Mecca falls into your hands."

And he lifted the pomegranate with his palm toward Bedr Basim.

"By Allah, you have solved the problem," cried the squatting figure on the cushions.

He took the pomegranate in his powerful brown hands and squeezed it. The blood-red juice dripped on to the white carpet.

"The problem is solved," cried the forty black mantles.

Bedr Basim turned his searching black eyes upon the kneeling figure.

"Who are you, brother?"

"I come from the desert," replied Red Rodgers simply.

"But you have the brain of a leader."

"One learns cunning in the desert," was the murmured reply.

"And tonight you join the last caravan, eh?"

"The last caravan!"

Unconsciously Red Rodgers repeated the phrase. There was something sinister in it. The last caravan! His first impulse was to escape from the white-walled room with its forty candles and forty black-mantled figures. He would return to the Arab palace of Eustace Adam and tell him of a great conspiracy that was stirring in the desert. But—

"Melodrama, my dear fellow! I don't believe a word of it."

He could hear the sneering words of the political officer, and see the delicate white hand stretching out for another cigarette. . . . Once again it would be necessary for the Red Wolf of Arabia to play a lone hand. But it was one man against a thousand fanatics.

"I go with the last caravan, tonight," he murmured.

A shout went up in that room. One by one the candles were guttering in a waste of wax. The light grew dim. Paul Rodgers felt a hand close like a steel trap about his own. He looked up. Bedr Basim was smiling down upon him.

"You will keep at my side, brother of the desert. There will be great need of your cunning brain."

But in those twitching eyes there was still the gleam of suspicion.

A STRANGE caravan was that last caravan. Two hundred men, a medley of camels dripping saliva and moaning as beasts damned to eternal burdens, with strange bundles bound against their mangy sides—the whole scene lit by smoking torches, and worthy of Doré.

In that darkness the black mantles had disappeared. They were replaced

by the white garb of men who journey across the desert. The two hundred looked more like a gang of slaves, with their bowed backs, pock-marked faces, and scanty garb stained with sweat. A bundle of digging tools was prominently displayed.

Bedr Basim surveyed the strange rabble from his riding seat on a camel.

"Rats from the cellars of Jidda!" he muttered contemptuously. "Let us hope that they will nose their way through the sand to the cellars of Mecca."

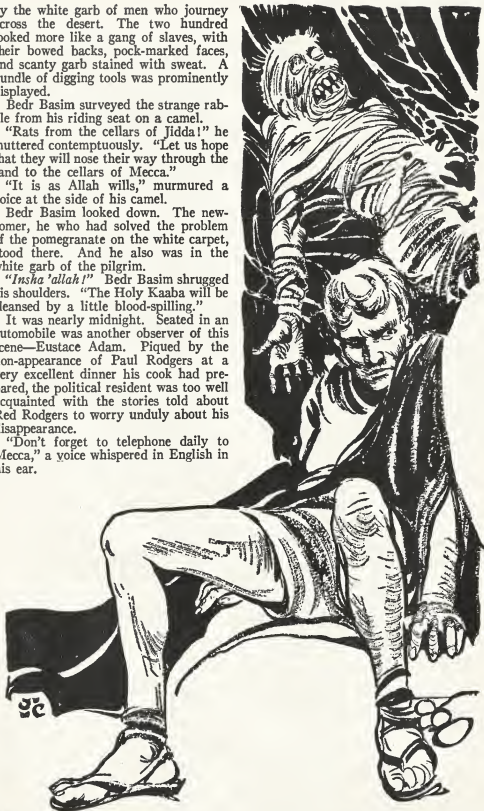
"It is as Allah wills," murmured a voice at the side of his camel.

Bedr Basim looked down. The newcomer, he who had solved the problem of the pomegranate on the white carpet, stood there. And he also was in the white garb of the pilgrim.

"*Insha 'allah!*" Bedr Basim shrugged his shoulders. "The Holy Kaaba will be cleansed by a little blood-spilling."

It was nearly midnight. Seated in an automobile was another observer of this scene—Eustace Adam. Piqued by the non-appearance of Paul Rodgers at a very excellent dinner his cook had prepared, the political resident was too well acquainted with the stories told about Red Rodgers to worry unduly about his disappearance.

"Don't forget to telephone daily to Mecca," a voice whispered in English in his ear.



Buried alive in the ancient desert tomb

What was beating that strange rhythm in the darkness? The mummy—had that music raised it from the dead?



of the Great Caliph

Startled, Eustace Adam swiveled his head in the direction of that voice. But except for an Arab in a not-too-clean white burnous, nobody was there. . . .

A guttural command from Bedr Basim. The crack of a whip in the darkness. The moaning and slobbering into one fiendish symphony of a hundred camels rising out of the sand. Answering shouts from the men. A smoking trail of torches. The last caravan was beginning to march.

"THIS, my master, is the man."

Red Rodgers threw back his shoulders and gazed boldly at the man who regarded him narrowly. He stood before Selim, the Syrian archæologist. And Bedr Basim, resplendent in a black mantle, was at his side.

They stood outside a tent in the desert—a black tent, such as the Bedouin pitches in the wastes of sand. Selim the Syrian was dressed in European fashion, open-necked white shirt, khaki breeches and polished yellow riding-boots. He toyed negligently with a riding-whip, and puffed a perfumed cigarette.

From beneath long eyelashes he regarded this slim Arab who stood before him.

"You have strange eyes," remarked Selim the Syrian quietly.

Red Rodgers did not flinch.

"They are as Allah and my mother bestowed upon me," he replied.

"So?"

The steady regard of those gray eyes seemed to irritate the Syrian.

"There is the cunning of a jinni in his head," broke in Bedr Basim.

There was the crack of a whip, and Bedr Basim staggered back. Selim had lashed out at him.

"Be quiet, dog!" ordered the Syrian.

Whimpering with pain, Bedr Basim crouched at his feet. Ignoring his presence, the Syrian turned to Rodgers.

"What is your name?"

"I am called 'the Fighter.'"

"So?"

"I fought against El Laurens and his men. Twice I came near to killing that cursed Englishman."

"And you have been a leader?"

"Our tribe has roamed freely over the desert ever since the great guns boomed against Jidda."

"So?"

The Syrian regarded him thoughtfully.

"Tell me of your plan, so that we may sacrifice these idolaters on the black stone of the Holy Kaaba."

Red Rodgers sank to his knees. His

long lean finger began to trace a plan of campaign, Arab-fashion, in the sand. He knew the topography of the Hedjaz well. He even flattered himself that his plan of campaign was a good one. A thousand men, bold and merciless in their methods, might take Mecca. As his finger moved rapidly over the sand and he gabbled his plan in Arabic, the Syrian, in spite of himself, was impressed.

"One by one the villages fall into our hands," explained Red Rodgers. "Mecca is the center of the noose. Slowly we tighten it, like a black scarf round the neck of a man. Tighter and tighter. The life gurgles out of him. One last despairing groan—and Mecca is ours. The black mantles rush into the streets of the holy city."

Selim the Syrian smiled mirthlessly.

"You are apt with your imagination, you who are called 'the Fighter.' Rise, and listen to me."

Rodgers rose. The whip negligently poked his shoulder and twisted him in the direction where the sun was sinking toward the waves of sand.

"Do you see?"

Selim the Syrian was pointing. Rodgers saw a white dome, almost engulfed in that sea of sand.

"I see."

"It is the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi, the false Caliph of Bagdad. In that tomb there now sits the only true Caliph, the *Veiled One*."

"Praised be the *Veiled One*!"

An ecstatic chant broke from the still cringing form of Bedr Basim.

The mirthless grin never left the lips of the Syrian.

"Tonight, you who are called 'the Fighter' will meet the *Veiled One*. And once again we shall hear your plan."

Paul Rodgers bowed his head.

"To Allah I shall give eternal thanks," he murmured.

IT was beneath a crescent moon, dangling like a silver scimitar over the desert, that a little group of men approached the white tomb of Mohammad Mahdi. They had to descend into a squared clearing, on the edges of which mounds of sand had been banked by the spade workers of Selim the Syrian archæologist.

It was Selim who led the little group. For this ceremonial occasion he had donned full evening dress. A purple order of Ottoman magnificence was stretched across his white shirt-front. He carried

a long black cane with a silver knob. Over all this magnificence was draped a black opera-cloak. To Red Rodgers he appeared the absurd apotheosis of stage villainy.

"Make clean your hearts before Allah," murmured Selim, "for you are about to hear the commands of the *Veiled One*."

The little group of men who followed Selim genuflected. Red Rodgers, like the others, knelt in the sand. A short muttering of verses from the Koran, and they rose. One by one in single file they stumbled after Selim, who led them through a narrow entrance, along a dark passage, their backs bent, and so into a spacious chamber.

Selim carried an electric torch. The thin silver beam cut the darkness and patterned the heavy granite walls of the tomb with a white circle. The air was foul and scented with decay. In that pitch darkness slit and crisscrossed with the beam of an electric torch, Red Rodgers shivered. A trembling hand closed on his own. It belonged to Bedr Basim, who had all the superstitious terror of the Arab pulsing in him.

A twinkle of light appeared. One of the Arabs had lit a candle. Other candles were quickly lighted. The candles burned steadily. Desert winds did not penetrate this tomb which for centuries had been sunk in sand.

Scattered about the strange chamber was the funeral furniture of the Caliph: Arab stools, a table, and a low wooden couch which had probably been the funeral bier. As Selim the Syrian moved a stool with his foot, a sand-rat scuttled away to some hidden hole.

Facing the little group was a granite doorway, fretted in Arabic fashion. This led to the inner chamber, the chamber of the dead. Somewhere in the darkness beyond lay the skeleton of the Caliph Mohammad Mahdi. Perhaps, also, the headless skeleton of the usurper!

"Peace be upon you, men of the black mantles," murmured a strange voice.

It came from the darkness of the inner chamber, from the darkness where lay the skeleton of the Caliph Mohammad Mahdi—a voice that had all the weariness of centuries in its tired but yet commanding tone. At the sound of it the men prostrated themselves, with the exception of Selim, who merely bowed his head in dignified fashion.

"Rise and seat yourselves, children of Allah," commanded the voice.

Red Rodgers was the first to face the figure that had entered the chamber. The *Veiled One*! A face covered with a black mask, a body enveloped in a costly black mantle. Through the slits of the mask the glittering gaze of two eyes fastened on Red Rodgers. The gaze held him. A medley of emotions, fantastic thoughts, suspicions, memories surged in him. The *Veiled One*! Could it be? Half-hypnotized, he sank upon the stool that was nearest to him.

"The thousand are ready. They are armed. They are waiting."

So began Selim the Syrian, the inevitable sensual smile on his face.

"Good."

The *Veiled One* nodded.

"Soon we shall surge through the streets of Mecca, killing the unbelievers, the infidels, and cleansing the Holy Kaaba of the idolaters," went on Selim, swishing his cane against a candle, so that it spluttered and went out.

A murmur went up from the little group.

"May Allah be praised. The *Veiled One* is the true and only Caliph. The black mantles will be all-powerful."

"And the plan?"

It was a harsh, direct question from the masked figure.

Selim indicated Paul Rodgers.

"Here is the man with the plan."

AGAIN those glittering eyes fastened on the slim figure in the black burnous. And in that moment Red Rodgers felt the chill of the tomb strike him. For the awful suspicion that had been in his mind when he first glimpsed this masked figure was now a certainty. He knew the person behind the mask. The *Veiled One* was—

"Before we hear the plan, let us drink coffee."

As the words were spoken, a negro slave materialized from the darkness beyond. In front of his polished black body he carried a tray with coffee-pot and brass cups. This tray he set upon the table.

The *Veiled One* waved the negro aside. "I will serve the coffee."

A brown, steady hand reached from beneath the black mantle and poured coffee into the cups. One by one the cups were handed to the little group of black mantles. Selim was served first. He accepted the cup with a smirk. Then came Bedr Basim, then the two other men. Red Rodgers waited.

The brown hand reached toward him, the cup held firmly. Rodgers stretched his own hand to take it.

"A bitter drink, but in Arabia the drink of friendship," murmured the *Veiled One*.

But a dead silence followed these words. For the hand had shaken, and the coffee spilled over the black burnous of Red Rodgers.

Selim the Syrian rose to his feet. The smile had left his face. The ruby lips were twisted into something ugly. The others in that chamber rose too. Only the *Veiled One* and Paul Rodgers remained seated, eyeing each other.

Instinctively all knew what that spilling of coffee indicated. This stranger from the desert was a marked man. He was to die. The Caliph had indicated the enemy in the customary Arab fashion.

"What does this mean?" muttered Selim the Syrian.

"Who brought this man?" asked the *Veiled One*.

Bedr Basim threw himself forward to the ground.

"I did, holy Caliph. The man solved the problem of the pomegranate and the carpet."

The *Veiled One* looked down upon the groveling Bedr Basim.

"I have to thank you. I have sought this man for many moons."

"He is named 'the Fighter,'" cried Selim.

The *Veiled One* smiled.

"He would be. But I know him as Paul Rodgers, the Red Wolf of Arabia."

Rodgers made one desperate lunge forward.

"And I know you, impostor, as—"

His hand was stretched out to tear the mask away from those glittering eyes. But at this desperate act of sacrilege, the others leaped forward.

Rodgers fought furiously. He whirled a funeral stool in the air and crashed it against the head of one of the Arabs, who went to the ground with a grunt. But Bedr Basim, who was already groveling when the attack began, clutched the legs of Red Rodgers and brought him to the ground. Desperately the Intelligence officer fumbled in his black mantle for his precious revolver. With a snarl he brought it forth, leveled it—then felt a mad, stabbing pain in his arm.

He gave a groan of agony, and the weapon slipped from his hand. He turned on his knees to find Selim the Syrian, the naked blade of a sword-stick

in his hand, smiling evilly at him. So that was the meaning of the silver-knobbed cane!

"Damn you!" he moaned, in English.

The other Arabs were upon him. Bleeding freely from his arm, Rodgers nevertheless used his feet effectively. Once again the Syrian prepared to lunge with his blade.

"Enough, Selim!"

The *Veiled One* had spoken.

"The dog must die!" snarled Selim.

"The dog shall die," murmured the *Veiled One*. "But among the Arabs there are a thousand and one deaths, as well as a thousand and one fairy-stories. And those deaths are equally unpleasant."

Complete imperturbability marked the utterance of the *Veiled One*. The figure had not stirred from its sitting posture, had not even winced when the sacrilegious hand was stretched forth to tear away the mask. And now the *Veiled One* gazed down upon Paul Rodgers' futile struggles against odds which included the negro slave. Within a few minutes he was securely bound and helpless.

"And now?" asked Selim.

"Carry him into the other chamber," ordered the *Veiled One*.

The powerful negro slave took the captive in his arms. He was carried easily through the fretted doorway into the darkness. Even in his half-fainting condition, he was conscious of the overwhelming stench of decay. He was thrown roughly onto some rugs, and the negro padded away. Dimly he heard the voices in the next chamber.

The *Veiled One* was speaking in that strange voice, tired but commanding. And knowing the voice so well, Paul Rodgers sensed a chill creeping slowly through his bruised body.

HALF an hour later yellow light streaked the darkness. The negro slave had entered, a giant black acolyte carrying lighted candles. And behind him stalked the masked figure in the black mantle.

Carefully the candles were placed on the ground. They flung tortured, elongated shadows against the stone walls of the tomb.

"Release the infidel's hands, and raise him!" commanded the *Veiled One*.

The negro was clumsily obedient. Rodgers was propped up with his back against the wall.

"And now wait for me in the next chamber."

The slave bowed low and shuffled ungainly out of that fantastic yellow light. The *Veiled One* and Paul Rodgers were left alone. It was only through the mist of half-consciousness that the Intelligence officer visualized these movements. But a spark lit his gray eyes as the *Veiled One* spoke quietly in English:

"So we meet again, eh?"

The flaming crop of red hair seemed to slump a little wearily.

"I ought to have known that the *Veiled One* would be yourself," he murmured in reply. "There is no one else in Arabia with the imagination or the fiendish ingenuity to embark upon such an adventure."

"You flatter me, Paul."

A ripple of laughter came from beneath the mask.

Rodgers closed his eyes. The wound in his arm was painful.

"Nevertheless you will find this adventure too big even for your insensate ambition," he said through clenched teeth. "You cannot capture Mecca as easily as a handful of dates."

"I have a thousand men, all fanatics and every one a fighter," said the *Veiled One*. "Moreover I have you, the Red Wolf of Arabia, the most dangerous *feringhee* in the whole Arab world. Could I have hoped for more? Allah is on the side of the black mantles."

"Blasphemous cheat!" cried Rodgers.

Again that ripple of laughter.

"And what brought you nosing my trail again like a hungry jackal?" went on the *Veiled One*. "I am curious to know. Ah, of course! You were in Jidda. It was necessary to kill a fool of an Italian and his love-sick Arab girl. They had learned something of the black mantles; and like all foolish children who have discovered a secret, they thought they would whisper it to others. Luckily the words were strangled in their throats in time. But you were there. You have almost a feminine intuition in these matters, Paul. And so you donned the black mantle, thereby delivering yourself into our hands. Fool! I recognized you the moment I set eyes on you. Even if it were not for the vanity that won't allow you to dye that romantic crop of hair, those gray eyes would tell me everything."

Rodgers twisted a smile.

"The recognition," he murmured, "was mutual."

A ripple of rage passed through the black mantle.



"Ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha!" Petrified, the grave-robbers saw a man as white as a corpse gazing down upon them. A ghost—a white jinni!

"And once again, Paul, you are going to see that face close to your own. You know the story of the *Veiled One* of old? I see you do. No one looked upon his face and lived. Such blasphemy was struck down immediately by the sword. And I, the *Veiled One* of today, have sworn the same oath. 'No one shall look upon my face and live. And I am now going to unveil myself before you.'"

"A convenient threat for you," mur-

mured Red Rodgers. "A thousand ships were launched because of Helen's fair face. But that was in Greece. In the Hedjaz not even a thousand men would march on Mecca if they learned the blasphemous truth that the one who has assumed the black mantle of the holy Prophet, who dares to attack the Holy Kaaba and be proclaimed Caliph, is—"

The *Veiled One* tore off the mask with a fierce gesture. Two brilliant eyes blazed at Rodgers.

"Is a woman, eh?" hissed the figure in the black mantle.

"Yes, the Woman of Antioch," replied Paul Rodgers steadily.

Once again he found himself facing this strange creature who was the apotheosis of the medley of emotions surging in the Oriental woman. Hatred, mingled with distorted desire, gleamed in the black pools of her eyes. The full red lips were half-parted as though in an ecstasy. And the low, rich voice, almost masculine in its depth and intensity, now lashed him unmercifully.

"I am that same woman of Antioch who held you prisoner in my house in Cairo. You were clever that day, Paul. But you also dared too much. You placed my boy in danger. While I waited to shatter with bullets the miserable carcass of King Saad, you dangled my boy on your knee before the leveled rifles! Only the damnable ice-cold brain that thinks beneath that flaming hair could have devised such an escape. You laughed over it, you and your friends on the veranda of Shephard's Hotel. But the laugh died when my threat came. For you knew that the day was coming when I should exact full vengeance."

Red Rodgers regarded her from beneath his half-closed lids.

"I have never underestimated your melodramatic earnestness, madam," he murmured.

The plump features came nearer. He could see the kohl smearing her eyes; he sensed the heavy perfume with which she had drenched her body. She twisted so that she leaned against him.

"The last time we parted," she went on, "it was with my lips on yours. Ah, I see you have not forgotten that, either. Am I then so repulsive to you? Tonight we are to part forever. You will never look upon a living woman again. So, hating me as you do, look your fill. And taste the last woman's kiss you will ever receive."

WITH a sudden movement she pressed her lips on his. Weak and helpless, Rodgers struggled. His whole being sickened at the contact. His freed hands tore at the black mantle. He twisted her shoulder mercilessly. His fingers dug through the black stuff into her flesh.

A cry of pain came from her. He flung her aside. As she staggered away, the black stuff of her mantle was ripped, and the white flesh of her shoulder was bared, revealing the scar of a cross. The Woman of Antioch had been branded!

Cursing softly, she hastily covered the damning mark on her shoulder, and again covered her face with the mask.

Once more she was the *Veiled One*. She also recovered something of that poise with which Red Rodgers had been struck in his previous encounter with her.

"That is the end of our romance, Paul," she said quietly. "It only remains for me to take my departure. At the head of a thousand black mantles I shall advance on Mecca. There is one final tribute I shall pay to you: I shall use your plan, the plan so adequately expressed by the pomegranate and the white carpet. I only regret that you will not be with us to see it in operation."

Rodgers was too weary to banter further. He leaned his head against the wall.

"*Insha 'allah!*" he murmured. The Arabic fatalism suited his mood. "Bring in your thugs and strangle me as you did that poor Italian."

He was answered by soft laughter.

"No, my dear Paul, that would be too easy; I'm afraid your death pangs must be prolonged. The Arab mind is only rivaled by the Chinese in its devising of delectable deaths. Yours is to be particularly apt. Open your eyes, and gaze about you."

He stared at the woman uncomprehendingly. She was carrying lighted candles toward the far shadows. And their flickering flame revealed a horrible sight.

A mummified figure lay there, the wrappings gashed at one side. Through the gash of this bandaged chrysalis dangled a yellow skeleton arm. The head, too, had been exposed, the teeth showing death's eternal grin.

"Once the holiest of all men, and the prophet of Allah," mused the Woman of Antioch. "It is all that is left of Mohammed Mahdi, Caliph of Bagdad."

She laughed softly as she stuck a candle at the head of the figure.

"And the headless skeleton, the usurper?" asked Rodgers.

She turned toward him.

"I do believe that you are much more the archaeologist than my brother Selim," she said. "I regret to spoil a pretty story, Paul, but the headless skeleton was not found in the tomb. Of course, we may not have searched closely enough. You will have excellent opportunities to continue our rather perfunctory researches."

"What do you mean?"

She placed another candle at the foot of the mummified figure.

"The Red Wolf of Arabia is to be given a tomb worthy of his notoriety," she

went on. "When we leave here, within the hour, the tomb will be sealed. Heavy boulders prevent anything but sand-rats entering the sacred burial place of Mohammad Mahdi. But it will also be the burial place of Paul Rodgers. Don't be unduly distressed. You are to be left here alive. In fact, I have given orders for enough provisions to be left to keep you alive for a week. There will also be enough candles for at least three days. I should like you to meditate upon the remains of Mohammad Mahdi. And when you are hungry and insane, I've no doubt you will make excellent companions. You see, everything has been devised to keep you from dying too soon. A man like yourself should be given every opportunity of getting used to his tomb before death claims him."

"I am honored."

She moved toward the door. Once only did she turn, and from behind that black mask her eyes gleamed strangely. The next moment she passed into the darkness, and Red Rodgers was left staring at the mummified figure that grinned at the granite ceiling.

Quickly he struggled with the thongs that still bound his feet. As his fingers tugged furiously at them, he could hear the heavy breathing of men as they worked in the distance. There was the crashing sound of a boulder rolled against the outer doorway, then another. The doorway was blocked.

Rodgers tried to struggle to his feet. His legs were numb. He stumbled and fell. The pain in his arm throbbed through his whole body. Half crawling, a lighted candle dripping hot wax over his hand, he stumbled through the doorway, along that narrow passage and reached the end. It was blocked completely. With a groan he pitched to the ground in a faint.

ARCHÆOLOGISTS are among the darlings of our civilization. For their researches in the dust and débris of the past, honors and titles are heaped upon them. Modern man in his skyscraper, and with electric toys to his hand, is flattered when shown the withered corpse of his early progenitors. Yet though there are thousands of years between the Egyptian mummy in its glass case in the British Museum and the slum child of today idly gazing at it, civilization does not seem to have advanced much.

That the archæologist is after all merely a grave-robber, a ruthless digger

of the dead, was borne in upon the mind of Paul Rodgers as he opened his eyes in the darkness of the tomb. Dimly in the distance he could discern a flickering yellow light. It came from the candle which the Woman of Antioch had left burning by the mummified body of Mohammad Mahdi. His faint could not have lasted half an hour.

Quickly he stumbled along the passage back to that chamber of the dead. Less than an inch of the candle remained. The exposed head seemed to shrivel at the nearness of the flame, but the teeth were still clenched in a macabre grin. Near the body lay a heap of candles, some dried dates and figs, coffee, and a jar of water. A sand-rat which had been nibbling at these provisions scuttled away at his approach.

Hurriedly Rodgers lighted another candle. He tore off part of his garment, and made some sort of bandage for his arm. Then he sat down to consider the situation.

The full fiendishness of the death devised for him by the Woman of Antioch began to appear. There were enough provisions and a sufficiency of water to keep him alive for a week—at the most, twelve days. Obviously there was no chance of his escape; otherwise the provisions would not have been left. Actually, they desired to prolong the agony of his imprisonment in this sinister tomb so that he would end it all a madman.

How long could a man be expected to sit at the side of a mummified figure that had been dead a thousand years and still retain his sanity? He had a sudden horrible vision of himself at the end, a gibbering madman recklessly lighting one candle after another and apostrophizing that withered creature of the eternal grin. And the mummified Caliph would grin back at him. He shuddered. Then he took a firm hold on himself. . . .

Eustace Adam and the palace in Jidda! The piano and the nuances of Debussy! How civilized and how secure it now seemed in retrospect! Would Eustace Adam, suddenly plunged into such a situation, a prisoner in a tomb with only a mummified body and a few rats as companions, dare to light a cigarette and sneeringly describe it as in the worst melodramatic taste? Rodgers laughed aloud at the thought. His laugh echoed strangely throughout the tomb. The mummified figure seemed to laugh too. Rodgers found himself jerking his head and peering into the shadows.

Already his nerves were taut and ready to snap. He took the candle away from the head of the mummy, gathered some of the provisions in his hand and walked into the adjoining chamber. Here at least he would be free from the presence of Mohammad Mahdi. And he might profitably spend an hour examining his prison and seeing if there was any possibility of escape. Even Selim the Syrian archæologist might have overlooked some other entrance to the tomb. With a sudden enthusiasm he began with the candle, examining every yard of those stone walls about him.

After two hours, with a fresh candle lit, he had to sit down and admit defeat. The tomb was as safe a prison as the latest steel cell in Sing Sing. Secret passages had not entered into the imagination of the man who a thousand years before had built this stone house in the desert. There was only one entrance, and that was also the exit. Heavy boulders blocked it completely.

Rodgers yawned. He suddenly felt the need for sleep. The candle burned steadily at his side; and although he had couched himself on a few rugs, he hesitated before blowing out that flame and plunging the tomb into complete darkness. That mummified figure was still grinning there in the next chamber.

The funeral furniture of the room met his eye. Why not a fire? And there was coffee among the provisions. He began at once to break a stool into small pieces. The dry wood crumbled in his hands. A moment later, a little fire was blazing merrily in the center of the stone-walled room; and it certainly brought a comforting glow to the chilled body of Paul Rodgers.

Sleepily he stretched himself on the rugs and blinked at the little flames. He found himself drifting into strange dreams.

"If only I had a piano, I would play mad music to that damned mummy," was the last absurd thought that flitted through his waking mind.

FEW civilized men can endure silence. Stillness can be more deadly than noise. Red Rodgers of Arabia was brought perilously near to madness in the days and nights that followed.

Days and nights! He could not distinguish either. Time had been obliterated. There was only darkness, relieved by one solitary candle, the flame of which was jealously guarded. Sometimes for

an hour, two hours, Rodgers would endure total darkness. But that darkness smothered him, mind and body, more completely than a thousand black mantles. When combined with the awful stillness it became unendurable. Stamped on the screen of his mind, a lantern-slide that had jammed and could not be withdrawn, was the picture of the black mummy that had once been the holy Caliph.

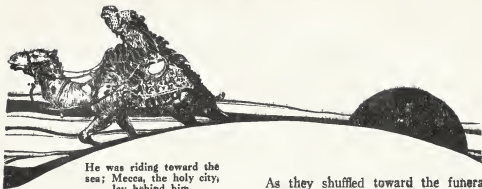
Those hours of darkness would end by whispered curses, the spurt of a match, and once again the blessed yellow flame of a candle flinging grotesque shadows of the imprisoned man on the walls of the tomb. Sometimes a wind would come sighing across the desert, whipping the sand-particles and stroking the stone walls outside with a soft, crooning sound. Once again the sand of the desert was smothering the tomb.

Rodgers tried to fill his waking hours with the scraps of music that twanged the taut nerves of his brain. Bits of Beethoven, the sadness of the Kreutzer Sonata, and snatches of resignation that came from the symphonies. Then would come a few macabre moments from Ravel—a mad medley of strange melodies merging into the limelight brilliance of Liszt. He would hum aloud their dissonances, then stop and listen acutely. Had something stirred?

With a sob he would light another candle recklessly, and stalk bravely into the funeral chamber. The mummy still grinned. The yellow skeleton arm still dangled from the bandaged chrysalis. Once or twice he could have sworn that the arm moved. And he would bend down, holding his breath, examining with the meticulous care of a surgeon that black withered face.

Day followed day. He lost all count of time. He had been in the tomb a hundred years, and was still alive. What fools those modern philosophers were! Bergson, who had written a whole book about laughter, had never heard the laughter of a man who was keeping an age-long vigil with a mummy. Ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! He clenched his teeth. He could grin alive as Mohammad Mahdi grinned in death. . . .

It could all be resolved into that mystic chord of Scriabine—the divine madness of the third piano sonata. Like a stab at the silken belly of the sky! He, Paul Rodgers, had last played it in a dismal café in Suez. Three half-castes, a coal-black Sudanese, the drunken skip-



He was riding toward the sea; Mecca, the holy city, lay behind him.

per of a tramp steamer, and a Bombay harlot—that had been his audience. And they had soared from their earthly hells to some ineffable heaven of their own imagination as his thin, sunburnt fingers conjured the music of Scriabine from the yellow ivory of the piano.

"*Tum—tum—ti um—tum!*" hummed Paul Rodgers, his fingers straying toward an imaginary piano.

"*Tum—tum—ti um—tum!*" hummed the bandaged corpse in the next chamber.

"*Tum—tum—tum!*"

That was wrong. The rhythm was wrong. The sound was wrong. But who was it, beating that strange rhythm in the darkness?

"*Thud—thud—thud!*"

"My God, I'm going mad!" whispered Rodgers to himself.

The noise continued. The mummy! Had that music raised it from the dead as once Lazarus stood and let the shroud fall from his death-wrapped figure? Was the living Mohammad Mahdi walking slowly from the funeral couch toward the dead Paul Rodgers? Darkness! Let there be darkness! The trembling hand of the Intelligence officer closed on the feeble yellow flame and strangled its life. One could hear better in darkness. And like life, stirring feebly in chaos, came the breathing of men.

Stretched at full length in the darkness, ear to the ground, Red Rodgers listened, frozen motionless as a jackal in the full flood of a beam of light—stabbed into inaction! And the breathing of men grew louder.

The faint stirring of wind. A few grains of sand against his cheek. Desert wind. Then footfalls. The *pad—pad—pad* of bare feet along that passage. The breathing of men. A whisper. The lilt of Arabic. And then the smoking, trailing fire of a torch.

As they shuffled toward the funeral chamber, those three Arabs did not notice a figure stretched on the ground wrapped in a black mantle. The glow of their torch did not reveal the glittering eyes of a man who had been in the hashish world of mad dreams. Intent upon their foul work, they padded quickly into the funeral chamber.

Grave-robbers! Those few whispered words of Arabic had told Red Rodgers everything. These human sand-rats had heard of the tomb that had been unearthed from the desert. From afar they had watched the departure of the thousand men who adventured against Mecca. They preferred to rob the dead rather than the living. Even at this moment their fingers were ruthlessly tearing away the bandages that swathed the body of Mohammad Mahdi. Somewhere there must be jewels. . . .

Bent upon their ghoulish work, the Arab grave-robbers did not notice that strange figure swaying in the doorway. Only when the silence of the tomb was suddenly shattered by mad laughter did they look up.

"*Ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha!*"

Petrified, they saw a red-haired man as white as a corpse gazing down upon them. A ghost! A white jinni! A desert madman!

"Allah protect us!"

"A jinni!"

They flung themselves groveling before that strange figure who seemed to sway in company with a multitude of shadows conjured by their torch. The laughter redoubled. It seemed to wing its way like a bat to the entrance of the tomb—an entrance they had created by moving the heavy boulders. It resounded along the dark passageway, and then was lost in the spaciousness of the desert.

When the three grave-robbers ventured to raise their heads, the tomb was vacant save for the grinning skull whose empty sockets stared at the stone ceiling.

WITH his knees gripping the mangy sides of a camel, the Red Wolf of Arabia raced through the desert. The beast he rode was one of two that he found kneeling in the sand outside the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi. They belonged to the grave-robbers. A scraggy camel, but its legs pounded away like pistons, tireless and mechanical. As he reeled in the saddle, faint from those long nightmare hours in the tomb, he laughed loudly like a maniac. Above him the sky was ablaze with stars. Greedily he drank the champagne air of freedom.

Forty miles away lay Mecca. Instinctively he urged the camel toward the holy city. He had carefully studied the direction on a map in the palace that belonged to Eustace Adam. No doubt the Woman of Antioch and her pitiless black mantles were already in possession of the black stone of the Holy Kaaba.

How long had he been in the tomb? Five days—ten days? He did not know. The plan of campaign he had suggested for the black mantles meant a fortnight's slow circling of the holy city.

The rhythmic pounding of the camel through the sand lulled his senses. He wanted to sleep. But the moment he closed his eyes, dreadful visions of the tomb and the swathed mummy appeared. Dare he ever sleep again and face that nightmare? In any case sleep was impossible at the moment. He must reach Mecca and enter the holy city. The Woman of Antioch must be cheated in her mad ambition. The black mantles would turn on her in fury when they saw that it was a woman who had dared to assume the holy black garments.

The thought of entering the holy city brought a thrill to his racked mind and body. He, Paul Rodgers, was emulating the red-bearded Burton of the Arabian Nights. He would feast his eyes on the Holy Kaaba, kiss the black stone, and then, without mercy in his heart, seek out the Woman of Antioch and unveil her. The rampant fanaticism of Mecca would do the rest. Let him perish in the rain of steel swords and knives that would descend. It would be a death far more worthy than that of a gibbering fool in a tomb. . . .

Thirty miles to Mecca. He was nearing the well-worn pilgrim route from Jidda. The scraggy beast he rode still pounded along tirelessly. He must avoid the villages which had already succumbed to the fanatical march of the *Veiled One* and the army of black man-

tles. His gray eyes searched the sky. No man could guide himself more surely in the desert. His feet kicked the camel's sides. The beast swerved obediently.

A plan was forming in his mind. He knew instinctively that those days and nights in the tomb had sponged the sun-burn from his features and left him white and ghostlike. One glance at his hands assured him of that. And the gray eyes were brilliant and feverish from the confinement. He looked—a white man.

The words of an old Arab pounded their way into his mind as he rode.

"Unbelievers," said the old Arab, "cannot exist in Mecca. The dogs would tear them to pieces in the streets, or God would strike them with thunderbolts from the skies."

But even if the seven delectable tortures awaited him, Paul Rodgers the unbeliever was determined to enter the holy city. . . .

Twenty miles to Mecca.

Night, and the canopy of stars still covered the desert.

THE pink of dawn was already streaking the sky when a man in Bedouin garb yawned and stretched his arms. He sat on a bench against a white wall, and by his side was a yellow lantern.

Along the narrow sandy path stumbled a strange figure swathed in a black mantle. The figure reeled from side to side like a man fuddled with hashish. Slowly the man in Bedouin garb rose from the bench. He took hold of the lantern and went forth to meet the reeling figure.

"Wallah!" he exclaimed. "Whence do you come?"

He held aloft the lantern and saw before him a pale white face and glittering eyes.

The figure in the black mantle reeled, and almost fell.

"I—I come from the desert," he muttered. "Allah be praised!"

"And your camel?" asked the man with the lantern.

"I am poor in worldly goods. I have walked from the desert."

"Wallah!" murmured the Arab, holding the lantern closer. "You are strangely white."

The glittering eyes twitched, and a ghastly smile crossed the grayish face the lantern revealed. A thin white hand stretched out from beneath the black mantle.

"The curse of the jinn is upon me," he muttered. "I come to Mecca to pray

that Allah the all-compassionate will cleanse my body."

The man with the lantern drew back with a start.

"A leper!" he whispered. His hands twitched. "May Allah cleanse you, my brother!"

And he turned his back and hurried away from the man in the black mantle who stumbled forward along that narrow sandy path.

Paul Rodgers was in Mecca.

He was hemmed in by a chasm of tall, straight flat-roofed houses. Narrow slits in the walls for windows seemed to wink wickedly at him. Beneath his bare feet the sandy street was strewn with the débris of pilgrimage—palm-leaves and sacking. And down that chasm in the early morning sunshine winged myriads of birds, holy birds that fluttered and swept in dizzying circles, unfrightened by this strange pale man in the black mantle.

He plunged into the semi-darkness of the bazaar. Here the morning sky was hidden by sackcloth stretched above. A sweetmeat-merchant sat methodically piling his sugary delights into little mounds. The pale stranger stopped beside him. The sweetmeat-merchant gave him one quick glance, and shuddered.

"May Allah protect us—a leper!"

It was a frightened whisper in Arabic. Rodgers nodded, and stretched out a thin hand.

"I have hunger, O seller of many sweet delights," he murmured.

With a terrified gesture the sweetmeat merchant took a little wooden bowl, piled it with sugary confections, and handed it to the man in the black burnous.

"Eat, my brother!" he whispered. "And may Allah cleanse your body!"

Rodgers took the bowl.

"I heard in the desert that the streets of Mecca were stained with blood," he said quietly. "Is it so, brother?"

"It is not so," replied the merchant. "Mecca is at peace, and the morning sunshine is even now gilding the Holy Kaaba. It is but a tale told by mad camel-drivers that you heard."

"May Allah be praised!" murmured Rodgers fervently. He realized that he was in time, and that the army of the black mantles had not yet clutched the pomegranate.

He nibbled with zest at some sugared dates. At the same time his burning gray eyes caught sight of a Mohammedan calendar hung with all the care of

a local London grocer at the back of the sweetmeat-stall. And the day stared him in the face. It was exactly a week since he had entered the trap of the tomb of Mohammad Mahdi. The black mantles were following his plan. They must now be within thirty miles of Mecca.

"Thank you, brother," he said, and stumbled on through the semi-darkness of the bazaar, while the sweetmeat-seller hurriedly withdrew to wash himself.

Others, early astir about their business in the bazaar, shrank from that thin pale figure in the black mantle. A leper! He was feared worse than death. Covering himself with the hood of his burnous, Red Rodgers smiled. He had prepared his entry into Mecca as carefully as any actor entering upon a flood-lighted stage. His make-up had been the work of half an hour, the smearing of his face with gray dust outside the city. And what appeared to be the silver sores of the leper on his arms was merely his own white skin rubbed with a stone.

ONCE more his brain was working with clarity. He must prevent the attack on Mecca. But how? The gray eyes were lost in thought as he stumbled along that street known as the Sûk es-Saghîr, flanked on each side with the open shops of butchers, fruiterers, chandlers, barbers, grain-sellers, lemonade-sellers—the paying road to Paradise along which the pilgrims pass. Arabs squatted on their rush-matting in the dust. They displayed, strewn on these mats, slices of mauled melon, battered prickly-pears, grimy bowls of sour milk, stale bread, and a few diseased tomatoes. Nevertheless this was one of the streets of wealth, the Fifth Avenue of Arabia, and the prize of loot promised to the army of the thousand black mantles led by the *Veiled One*.

Suddenly, in the quick dawn, rose a mournful quavering cry. Immediately Red Rodgers stopped in his shuffle through the bazaar. Men around him dropped to the dust like automata at that cry. And the cry was repeated, echoing and reëchoing in volume as the sun swelled into the sky.

"Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! Ashhadu ann lâ ilâha ill Allah. . ."

It was the call to prayer, ringing out in a magnificent volume of sound from the seven towers that overlook the city.

Red Rodgers also sank on his knees in the dust of the street.

"There is no God but Allah!" he repeated.

When he raised his head again, the sun was glittering everywhere. Those ringing cries had raised the curtain as the fateful knocks in a French theater begin the drama.

"It is whispered that there is an infidel in Mecca—a spy."

The muttered Arabic came to him as

The man with the lantern drew back with a start. "A leper!" he whispered. "May Allah cleanse you, my brother!"

he raised himself from the dust. Slowly he turned his head. It came from a group of men sipping their cups of coffee at a little table outside the coffee-house. The eyes of one of them fell upon the pallid stranger, and examined him, curiously. Then he twitched the sleeve of one of his companions, whispered something and pointed. The other turned, and his eyes glinted at sight of the black mantle.

Without hesitation Rodgers shuffled forward. He confronted the group of coffee-drinkers and held out a thin hand, clutching a bowl.

"May the grace of Allah be with you eternally!" he croaked.

The two men rose to their feet with a shudder of disgust.

"A leper!" they cried.

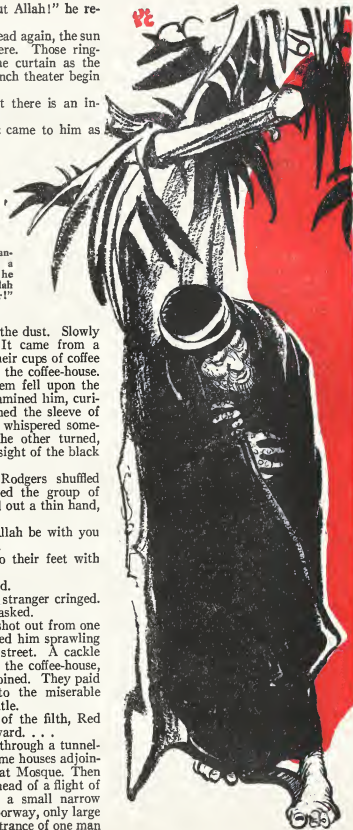
The black-burnoused stranger cringed.

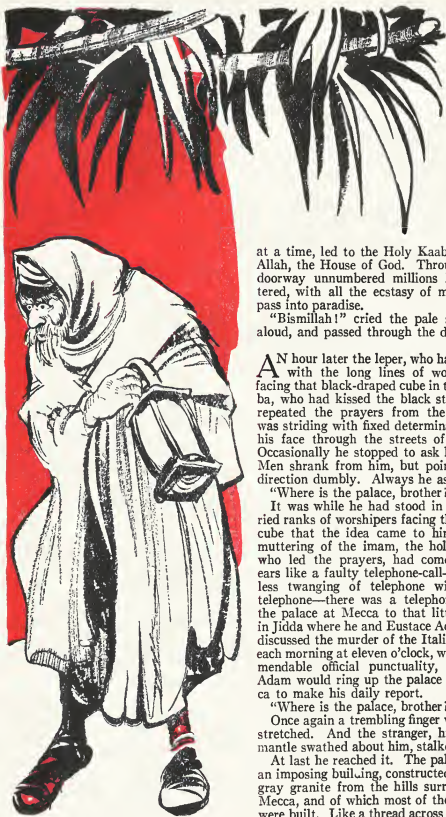
"Give me food!" he asked.

But a sandaled foot shot out from one of the group, and kicked him sprawling into the debris of the street. A cackle of laughter went up in the coffee-house, in which the two men joined. They paid no further attention to the miserable figure in the black mantle.

Picking himself out of the filth, Red Rodgers stumbled forward. . . .

Soon he was passing through a tunnel-like passage beneath some houses adjoining the wall of the Great Mosque. Then at last he came to the head of a flight of stone steps leading to a small narrow gateway. This little doorway, only large enough to permit the entrance of one man





at a time, led to the Holy Kaaba, Bayt Allah, the House of God. Through this doorway unnumbered millions had entered, with all the ecstasy of men who pass into paradise.

"Bismillah!" cried the pale stranger aloud, and passed through the doorway.

AN hour later the leper, who had stood with the long lines of worshipers facing that black-draped cube in the Kaaba, who had kissed the black stone and repeated the prayers from the Koran, was striding with fixed determination on his face through the streets of Mecca. Occasionally he stopped to ask his way. Men shrank from him, but pointed the direction dumbly. Always he asked:

"Where is the palace, brother?"

It was while he had stood in the serried ranks of worshipers facing the black cube that the idea came to him. The muttering of the imam, the holy priest who led the prayers, had come to his ears like a faulty telephone-call—a restless twanging of telephone wires. A telephone—there was a telephone from the palace at Mecca to that little office in Jidda where he and Eustace Adam had discussed the murder of the Italian. And each morning at eleven o'clock, with commendable official punctuality, Eustace Adam would ring up the palace at Mecca to make his daily report.

"Where is the palace, brother?"

Once again a trembling finger was outstretched. And the stranger, his black mantle swathed about him, stalked on.

At last he reached it. The palace was an imposing building, constructed of that gray granite from the hills surrounding Mecca, and of which most of the houses were built. Like a thread across the sun-scorched sky was the telephone-wire.

From beneath the hood of his black mantle Rodgers' eyes had searched for it; but even as he glimpsed it, misgivings seized him. Surely the Black Mantles had already cut that slender line of communication with the coast?

He passed into the courtyard of the palace. A few black slaves eyed indifferently the leper in the black mantle who shuffled his way through the dust. Rodgers found a doorway into which he passed, and was immersed in the coolness of the shadows within.

Room after room he wandered through in the palace without hindrance. Slaves were grouped about. An occasional khaki-clad Arab soldier drowsed over an old musket. The indolence and indifference which greeted Rodgers everywhere told him that the Sheik, the ruler of the Hedjaz, was away. A whisper among the slaves confirmed it. The Sheik was at Medina, many miles north, on a visit.

RODGERS covered his face carefully with the black mantle. He did not wish to declare himself a leper, here in the palace of the Sheik.

It was at this moment, in a palace in the heart of holy Mecca, that Red Rodgers heard a sound which filled him with joy. It was the shrill tinkle of a bell. And an ear tuned for any sound gave him the direction. Without hesitation he plunged through a little doorway half hidden by a hanging carpet.

He was in a private apartment belonging to the Sheik. His bare feet, dusty and bleeding, sank into the softness of the rich Bokharan rugs with which the floor of the room was scattered. But of the luxuries of the apartment he noticed nothing. His eyes sought at once the fretted Arab table on which stood the prosaic telephone.

A brilliantly garbed Arab whose green turban surmounted a grave, intellectual face, had already stretched out his manicured brown hands toward the instrument. But to his profound astonishment a black shadow crossed his path. He looked up to see a man garbed in a black mantle, a man with a pale face and red flaming hair who had seized the telephone and was gabbling in a strange tongue into its carved mouth.

"Is that you, my dear fellow? Is that you? Paul Rodgers speaking. Yes, at Mecca. In the palace. Listen! I want to tell you—"

The Arab in the green turban flung himself upon the foul intruder. Rodgers

did not hesitate, but lashed out with his fist and sent the Arab groaning to the ground. From the corners of his gray eyes he watched him twisting and muttering on the soft Bokharan rugs.

"Yes, my dear fellow, I had to knock some one down."

"But what does it all mean?" cackled the voice of Eustace Adam in Jidda. "You'll be killed, Paul. You're a damned nuisance in Mecca. You've no right to be in Mecca. Don't expect me to—"

"This is a matter of life or death to the Sheik and everyone in Mecca," broke in Paul Rodgers. "At the moment an army of a thousand men are advancing across the desert toward the holy city. They're fanatics, led by one who intends to be proclaimed the Holy Caliph. I've no time to explain. . . . They're the men who gathered together at the diggings. . . . Yes, Selim the Syrian. . . . Organized a revolt. . . . There's one chance in a hundred of beating them. Send the three airplanes from Jidda—the airplanes owned by the Sheik. It's your only chance."

The Arab in the green turban had crawled to his feet. He swayed, and as he gazed at that red-haired figure in the black mantle who was speaking rapidly in a strange tongue, down the telephone, he yelled at the top of his voice.

Still eying him, Red Rodgers babbled his final words. "Bomb them from above. It's your only chance. You've three hours to do it."

"But what about you, Paul?" Adam protested. "You'll never get out of Mecca alive."

The only reply was a laugh.

At the same moment three black slaves rushed into the room in response to the yells of the green-turbaned Arab. He pointed to the strange figure in the black mantle.

"An infidel!" he screamed. "Seize him. He is Inkilizi!" (English).

The slaves went forward. The pale intruder awaited them calmly. He bared his arms. At the sight of the grayish-white skin the foremost slave stopped.

"Wallah!" he cried. "He is a leper!"

The other slaves muttered the dreaded word, and hesitated.

"Aye, a leper," said Rodgers in Arabic, grinning at them. "The man who dares to lay hands on me will wither and become accursed in the sight of all who are clean."

"Why was this filthy dog allowed to enter the palace?" snarled the Arab in

the green turban. Unconsciously he was wiping his hands. "He is an infidel."

"I am no unbeliever," replied the pallid stranger. "I entered the sacred Kaaba for the first prayer this morning, and went on my knees to Allah. An infidel who dared that would be struck dead."

"Why spoke you in Inkilizi over the telephone?" asked the green turban.

"Because I am come to Mecca with bad news," went on Rodgers. "A thousand men, who call themselves the Black Mantles, are even now marching on Mecca. They intend to take the city by the sword."

The dark eyes of the Arab gleamed suspiciously.

"What do you know of the Black Mantles?" he asked.

"I know their plans and their leader," replied Rodgers. "The Black Mantles are led by the *Veiled One*."

"The *Veiled One*!"

Even the slaves repeated the name with awe.

"And the *Veiled One* is—a woman."

The Arab started at the revelation.

"Is there a woman in Arabia who dares assume the mantle of the Holy Prophet?" he bellowed.

"Go into the desert with your men and discover the truth of my words."

Taking a silken cloth in his hands, the Arab went to the telephone. Gingerly he took hold of the receiver.

"Give me Jidda—the political resident—at once!" he ordered.

There was the cackling response of an excited voice.

"Wallah! The line is cut!" he exclaimed.

"The Black Mantles!" said Paul Rodgers.

The Arab in the green turban eyed him suspiciously. He whispered an order over his shoulder to one of the slaves. The man went out of the room, and reappeared almost immediately with a piece of white chalk. He bent down, and carefully, over the rich carpets, chalked a huge circle in the center of which the intruder stood and waited.

"And now," said the Arab, "we shall see the truth of your story. I am going into the desert to find these Black Mantles. And if they exist only in the imagination of your diseased mind, then, leper though you be, I shall have you tortured so that even those numb nerves will suffer agonies. You will stay here until my return. A soldier with a rifle will be on guard at the doorway of this

room. Dare to move outside the circle of chalk, and you will be shot like a dog."

"The truth shall prevail," murmured the gray-eyed stranger.

"Let your prayers be to Allah, who is the truth!" replied the Arab.

And turning, he quickly left the room.

The slaves waited. A khaki-clad soldier appeared in the doorway, a loaded rifle in his hands. At the sight of him, the slaves slunk away. Rodgers squatted on the floor Arab-fashion. From out the folds of his black mantle he brought forth his beggar's bowl, still with the sweetmeats that had been given him in the bazaar.

Outside, bugles were blowing. Loud commands were being shouted. Camels were grunting into action. And whispers were being carried excitedly through the many rooms of the palace.

And within his circle of chalk, watched narrowly by the sentry, the Red Wolf of Arabia munched a sugar stick.

IT was about three in the afternoon.

Rodgers dozed comfortably within the circumscribed area, in the richly carpeted room in the palace of Mecca. Suddenly, from the distant desert, came a roaring sound. The sentry, watchful as ever, pricked up his ears. Rodgers opened his eyes and listened.

It was as though a colossal wind were sweeping toward the city. The roar grew louder. It was over Mecca, and zooming toward the palace.

"The jinn of the air!" muttered the sentry.

Now the palace was shaking to that roaring rhythm. Rodgers smiled.

"Good boy, Eustace!" he murmured.

Three airplanes piloted by European-trained Arabs were throbbing over the holy city. With these airplanes the ruling Sheik commanded the desert tribes and was thereby all-powerful. But Mecca itself was too holy for such modern machines. They were kept secretly at Jidda, ready to attack the enemies of the Sheik. That brief telephone message had stirred Eustace Adam to action, and he had dispatched them on their war mission immediately.

"Allah help the Black Mantles!" grunted Paul Rodgers, and closed his eyes again contentedly.

The zooming sound died away; the three airplanes were heading for the desert. Silence once again descended upon the holy city, and in the palace Red

Rodgers couched himself comfortably. Soon he was snoring lightly. The sentry gazed at him in wonderment.

"Wallah! He is a leper, but his soul is at peace with God," he said to himself. And he drowsed lazily over his rifle.

IT was in the evening when the darkness of the room was rudely dispelled by the entry of men with smoking torches. In their white burnous and lit by the flickering yellow light, the Arabs were like the figures of a Doré imagination.

As they ranged themselves in the room, Red Rodgers glimpsed a solitary prisoner in their midst—Selim the Syrian. He was still in European costume, open-necked white shirt, khaki breeches and yellow riding-boots. But they were sadly soiled; the shirt was torn, and the riding-boots were smothered in the dust of the desert. His Oriental face was twitching with terror.

He recognized Rodgers at the first glance—and stared incredulously at him. "Even the dead fight against us!" he moaned.

At the moment of that recognition the Arab in the green turban stalked into the room. He eyed the two men gravely.

It was Rodgers who first spoke. Rising slowly within the circle of chalk, he turned to the Arab.

"The *Veiled One*—where is she?"

The Arab shrugged his shoulders. He was about to speak, when Selim, a sneer on his ruby lips, spat forth:

"She lives, and will not fail to exact vengeance."

Paul Rodgers shook his head sadly.

"So once again the Woman of Antioch and myself must meet," he murmured.

The Arab in the green turban gave an order. Selim, cursing and shouting, was seized. His cries could still be heard as he was hustled through the corridors of the palace.

"He dies tonight," said the Arab. "But not so bravely as did those followers who battled in the desert. They were bombed from the sky, and their blood spattered the white sand. Thanks to you, the Black Mantles are no more."

"But the *Veiled One* remains."

"She is only a woman!" The Arab dismissed her with a contemptuous gesture.

"*Insha 'allah*," Red Rodgers fell back on the fatalism of the desert.

The Arab in the green turban, standing

well without the circle of chalk, eyed him curiously.

"You are the first leper who dared enter this palace, and yet you brought useful news. You may ask for whatever you will."

"I wish only one thing," said Rodgers.

"And that is?"

"A camel."

The Arab seemed surprised.

"Of what need for a camel has a leper?"

"I wish to ride away into the desert," said Paul Rodgers.

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

The Arab clapped his hands. Once again the three black slaves appeared.

"You shall have the best camel in Mecca," he said.

He gave orders to the slaves, who hurried away.

"And now, I suppose, I may go?" queried the pale stranger.

"With the blessing of Allah, and the surety that I shall relate to the Sheik on his return the strange story of the leper who dared to enter this palace, who spoke in Inkilizi into the telephone, and who dared to strike me and yet lives."

"Strange stories have been told in Arabia," murmured Paul Rodgers, wrapping the black mantle about his body.

At the same moment he stepped boldly outside the circle of chalk. The Arab in the green turban retreated a step, hastily.

"May Allah cleanse your body!" he muttered. He raised his hand in a gesture of farewell. "Where go you now?"

In the doorway Paul Rodgers turned.

"To seek a woman—and kill her," he replied quietly.

"Bismillah!" cried the Arab, and then found himself alone. Only the circle of chalk remained to tell him of the strange visitor.

He shuddered. Then he clapped his hands. A slave appeared.

"Burn those rugs!" he ordered, and stalked out of the room.

THREE hours later the Red Wolf of Arabia was riding toward the sea and Jidda. Mecca, the holy city, was behind him. He was urging the splendid camel to its utmost.

In his mind was the tempting vision of a piano, and his fingers were itching to stray gently over the keys.

Another thrilling tale of the Red Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.

The Devil's Taxicab

A physician plays detective to solve the mystery of a strange demon of the highways. . . . A spirited story by a clever writer new to these pages.

By

ROY HOON

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



THIS time," announced Sergeant Dan McCreevy, barging into the waiting-room of Dr. Bartram Cobb, "I've a fresh chocolate milk-shake for you, Doc."

The chocolate milk-shake rolled a pair of scared alabaster eyes around the immaculate room, and stood dejectedly dripping puddles of milk all over the center of the clean linoleum. His face bore the look of one who has gazed upon things unholy.

"Great Grief, Sergeant! What in heaven's name's happened to him?" Dr. Cobb stared in frank amazement at the milk-soaked Ethiopian nightmare before him. "Looks as if he must have had a loaded milk-train upset on him!"

"Even worse'n that, Doc. He was drivin' one of the big Sanilac milk-trucks through, and just coming onto Calamity Crossing, when—" A look of disgust shone on Sergeant McCreevy's face, and he raked his fingers through his crisp red hair unhappily. "Well, you know. Same old story again. Saw the Devil's Taxi tearin' right at him—lights blazin' and siren goin' like Billy-be-damned! When I got there—my Gawd! Milk

"Great grief, Sergeant! What's happened to him?" Dr. Cobb stared in amazement at the milk-soaked Ethiopian.

splattered over half the township, cans all over the road, and this bozo sittin' in the ditch up to his ears in milk! I put a blowout patch on his head where it was cut, got him into my side-car, and here we are."

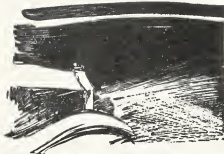
Dr. Cobb switched on the lights in his surgical dressing-room. The big darky regarded the new vista with marked disfavor, and sniffed apprehensively of the ominous scents that lurk about doctors' offices.

"Fetch him in here and I'll look him over. —Get that coat off and sit down on the stool by the sink."

He connected up a small spray, rinsed off most of the milk, and then carefully inspected the patient's ebony anatomy. Except for a two-inch scalp-wound, no particular damage was evident.

"Have to put about three sutures in that cut. What's your name, big boy?"

"Feets Johnson. Dey calls me Feets, 'cause I's got sech lawge feets."



"All right, Feets. Now while I sew you up, I want you to tell me just how you got like this." The Doctor dropped several shiny instruments and a needle threaded with silkworm gut into a pan of alcohol, with a loud rattle.

Feets shuddered, and hitched his chair slightly nearer the door.

"Yas suh, Doctah. . . . But I's much disencouraged by de looks o' dem tools. Dis job gonna hurt me? Yuh know my nerves is pow'ful wabbly aftah whut I's seen tonight!"

"Don't worry, Feets. I'll go easy on you. Now, big boy, just tell me what you did see."

"Well, Doctah, I'd been out ovah mah evenin' route an' had a big truckload o' full milk-cans goin' to de city. Jes' comin' onto dat Calamity Crossin', an' drivin' watchful. But purty lively, too, 'cause I neveh does crave loiterin' along dat place aftah night, sence all dis shenanigan stahted lately. . . . *Ee-yow!* Oh, Doctah!"

"Easy now, Feets. . . . Steady, boy. . . . That's one in. Just tell me what happened next."

"Well, as I was sayin' when yuh begun to ruin me, I jes come to de ol' crossin' when—*bam!* Dere come dat ol' debbil-car tearin' right at me an' blowin' his siren beat de band! Boy—did I make plenty room foh dat baby! Den, wham in de ditch I goes! When I wakes up, de cans an' milk hadn't all come down yet!"

"Now listen to me, Feets: Did you see this car?"

"No suh—can't 'zactly say's I did, but I sho seed his lights ra'rin' plumb at me an' his siren screechin' wuss'n' some one twistin' a wil'cat's tail!"

Dr. Cobb turned to Sergeant McCreedy. "Same old story is right. Just the same as the last six or seven, except for the milk. Mm! You know, Sergeant, this *is* funny. Odd you bloodhounds can't snap up this bird."

McCreedy fidgeted uncomfortably.

"If I did as well by my patients," went on Dr. Cobb, "as you fellows do in clearing up this business, they'd all die right here in my office."

Sergeant McCreedy got up.

"Now, lookee here, Doc!" he lashed out. "Just get this in your ear and gargle it around awhile. Me an' the whole troop's fed up on havin' wise guys like you tellin' us how we ought to nail this baby! As if we hadn't had the jitters all summer huntin' him! Layin' along the road behind bushes an' runnin' ourselves ragged watchin' for him. I don't believe in ghosts, but nobody's ever seen this bird yet. It's enough to make a fellow goose-pimply. Tell you what: some of you master minds ought to take about five minutes off for a rest some day an' grab this guy for us!"

"Well, I've half a notion to take you up, Sergeant. Got a lot of spare time on my hands anyway, since this depression crawled into bed with me." He put a friendly arm around the big trooper's trim shoulders. "Now listen, old topper: be yourself. Don't mind me ribbing you a bit, Sarge. If I didn't like you a lot, I'd never take the trouble. Nobody knows better than I do what you fellows are up against."

After Feets had been rehabilitated, Dr. Cobb got the data needed in filling out his compensation report, and bade his guests good-night.

Next day, all the harpies and harri-dans that seem to lie in wait for busy and kindly doctors descended upon him in swarms and made a witch's holiday of his contentment:

Mrs. Goldstein—abettèd by a bellowing husband—had twins. . . . He had to fish out an acute appendix from the pain-racked interior of Johnny Meadows. . . . Old Mrs. Kilkeary had one of her periodic yens to spend an afternoon with him unfolding her endless list of infirmities. . . . His coupé had two flats.

And at four o'clock he told his office girl: "Mollie, I'm damned if I can stand another minute of this! I'm going out to old Jeb Hatfield's place awhile. Shut up the shop at five."

Jeb Hatfield was the last one left, in this section, of an old frontier family which at one time had owned most of the township around Calamity Crossing. A fine upstanding family, the Hatfields, but now scattered to far places as the restless blood had driven them farther and farther westward. After Jeb's wife



Dr. Cobb emptied both barrels just under the onrushing lights.

had died, he had lingered on at the old stone farmstead. Here he still farmed, in a fashion, the tag end of the once great Hatfield estate.

For the past twenty years, Dr. Cobb had been Jeb's physician, and now and then he stopped and chatted awhile with the old fellow. An hour spent with old Jeb was an hour's escape from the hagridden present into the benison of a memory-scented past, where one seemed to hear the sleepy whir of spinning-wheels and the lonely all-day thud of axes biting into virgin timber.

DR. COBB climbed the worn stone steps onto the two-storied porch shaded by trumpet vines, where Jeb and his old hound had been sitting.

"Hello, Jeb. . . . Out this way and thought I'd just sit down here a bit and cool off with you. Have a stogie."

"Glad to see you, Doctor. Thank you. How you been? Here, sit in this chair."

Dr. Cobb settled back comfortably in the old bustle-backed rocker, and cocked up his long legs comfortably atop the long porch railing.

"You know, Jeb, I've been busy as a toad under a harrow today, and it always rests me to come out to your place." He looked thoughtfully across the sparsely planted fields, and then went on: "And while I'm here, I want to talk to you some about this crazy car or whatever it is, that's been carousing around here at night in front of your house scaring the packing out of half my patients."

Jeb fired up his stogie carefully and then said: "You know, Doctor, there always has been an awful lot of accidents here where Routes Seventy-seven and Twenty-two cross. No wonder they got to calling it Calamity Crossing. Been a

mighty bad crossing long before this spooky business started. The Highway Department ought to make an overhead crossing here, and be done with it. Can't understand why they put up with such a man-trap."

"Now, Jeb, of course I don't take any stock in this fenagling ghost-car business, but something's got to be done. Just last night I sewed up a big black truck-driver who swore old Nick almost drove right over him. That's about six or seven I've had this summer who all told the same story. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about this thing."

"Well, Doctor, I'll help you all I can. Go ahead."

"Now, first place, nobody's ever been able to see this wild bus, so far as I've been able to hear."

"Guess you're right, Doctor."

"And all the trouble comes after dark, and always when they are approaching the crossing going west on Route Seventy-seven. Then another funny thing is that they always see this car's lights at the same place. That right?"

"Guess you're right again, Doctor."

"Now, one thing's sure: these people must have seen *something*. They're not all ditching their cars and risking breaking their necks just to be playful. And what they see coming at them is not a car made out of thin air or moonshine, either."

Dr. Cobb gazed moodily down at the road intersection below, where cars passed frequently. He knew every inch of the ground, and could see nothing whatever that could suggest an answer to the strange riddle. There was old Jeb's house with a corncrib at the corner of the fence. Three gaunt locust trees in front of the house. Across the fence from the corncrib, a large "For Sale"

signboard announcing that the adjoining pasture-lands belonged to the Irwin heirs and could be bought cheaply.

They talked awhile longer. Finally, Dr. Cobb said good-by to his old friend, and started back to town.

After his office hours were ended that evening, he side-stepped an invitation from his wife to sit in on a little bridge session. Instead he smuggled his oldest boy, Jim, into his back office.

When Jim came out of conference considerably later, he had a strong hunch that his dad had stripped a gear in his head, or at least had gummed up the free-wheeling unit somehow. For it seemed that Jim was to take the old third-hand flivver girl-crate he owned, and drive his father smack into the Devil's Taxi, or whatever it was, that very night.

And this was exactly up Jim's alley, for he had inherited in full his father's love for an occasional lapse from the more orthodox modes of life, and he entered into the project with a fervent and enthusiastic gusto.

BY nine o'clock they were jogging on the way to Calamity Crossing. The windshield was down and the top was folded back. Two thick cushions were stuffed in the seat with them, and Dr. Cobb had his favorite twelve-gauge brush-gun set between his knees. As they neared the ill-savored crossing, he slipped two buckshot shells into the breech of the shot-gun.

"We'll slip these cushions in front of our wishbones so if we do run into something solid, we won't get all bashed in. Now give her the gun, Jim; and if you see him coming, tear right at him. I'll give his front tires the works. . . . Uh—oh! Look out! Here he comes!"

A wheezy roar from the gallant old Model T as she bravely tore straight toward the oncoming monster. The unearthly crescendo of a siren. Two splitting crashes as Dr. Cobb emptied both barrels just under the onrushing lights before they went out. And—nothing more!

Jim shot on his brakes, and reversed quickly to where the wreck should have been. In the light of their headlights they searched rapidly and minutely, but they found absolutely nothing on the smooth concrete. An eerie and complete silence held the entire place.

"Swing her around, Jim, and let's get right home."

On the way home, Dr. Cobb remarked to Jim: "Remarkable how much useful information can be loaded in two buckshot shells. Now, when we get home, just keep that old mouth of yours buttoned up tight, and before long we'll have this funny business turned inside out and see what makes it tick."

NEXT morning Dr. Cobb went back again for another look. Several times he walked up and down Route Seventy-seven looking for the marks of his buckshot. And then, by the merest chance, he saw some fresh splinters sticking out from behind the big For Sale sign.

Climbing over the fence, he examined the sign carefully. Yes, there it was. Part of his shot had hit the upper portion of the sign. He counted six clean holes where the shot had entered the front. Large splinters stood out at the rear of the sign where the shot had torn through. And here he could count *eight* holes. Hm! Must have missed counting a couple in front.

And then Dr. Cobb made a most curious discovery. After a painstaking hunt, he found that the bottom two holes in the back of the board had no corresponding holes in front. He also noted that the board was made of *two* thicknesses of one-inch pine wood, instead of only one as usual.

For a while he stood there deeply puzzled by this extraordinary phenomenon; then he suddenly reached into his pocket and took out a penknife. Opening a long, slender blade, he probed diligently in the holes in the rear of the board. The two bottom ones, to his satisfaction, gave forth a gritty feel, like steel touching broken glass.

He glanced over the fence and saw old Jeb hurrying down toward him along a weedy path. But before the old man got to him, Dr. Cobb had also found a pair of ropes running up in a curious way alongside the heavy posts supporting the signboard. He pulled on one rope, and saw the lower half of the front layer of boards move slightly.

"WHAT you looking for, Doctor?" There was menace and threat in the question, different from the mild and kindly tone Dr. Cobb knew for his real voice. The big black hound following Jeb stood stiffly near by, his hackles bristling evilly, and showing wicked gleam of teeth bared.

Dr. Cobb looked at the pair of them narrowly. "Great guns, Jeb! What's wrong? You'd think I'd kicked you on the shins or something! Nothing wrong with me looking at this old signboard of Irwin's, is there? Come on up on your porch, Jeb. There's some things I want to talk to you about."

For a moment old Jeb hesitated. Then he turned back and went along up onto the porch.

"Now, Jeb—first of all, get this: before this fish-frying starts, just remember I'm one of your best old friends, and am not out here to get you into any jam. My business is getting folks out of jams—not in. Keep that in mind as I talk along, and don't let that wild Hatfield blood boil over."

The old man's face showed deep displeasure, but he said nothing.

"Now, I'll get right to the nub of this business right off the bat. Over there just now I've found out enough to tell me who is driving this Devil's Taxi and scaring the lights out of everybody. Well, Jeb, it's nobody else than you—yourself!"

Jeb said never a word, and a chill air seemed to creep along the porch.

"Now, somebody was going to get to the bottom of such a fenagling business sooner or later. And it's mighty lucky for you, Jeb, it was me instead of some of these States who have been hiding behind bushes and prowling around here all summer. And let me tell you something else: I'm only beating them to it by about a hair, at that."

In his old ladder-backed chair Jeb still sat cold and silent. But a weariness had come over him, too. After all, he was just a lonely and tired old man.

Dr. Cobb went on: "Just before you came down, I found out some mighty interesting things about that old signboard of Irwin's. First thing funny is that it's made of two thicknesses of boards instead of one. Then I've found out what I think's a big mirror built into the lower half between the two layers of boards. That mirror can be uncovered by a rope rigging that holds the boards up in place in front of the mirror. And looks like the ropes lead into your corn-crib through that old piece of eight-inch gas-well casing that happens to be lying there, between the sign and your crib. And the glass sets just right to reflect back anyone's headlights coming west on Seventy-seven. They'd swear another car was coming straight at them at night.

And maybe there's an automobile siren in that corn-crib too."

Dr. Bartram Cobb bit off the end of a rat-tailed stogie and smoked reflectively for a while.

"Jeb, you're one of the best old skates left in this county. And I happen to know a lot about some of your troubles lately. Know you'd sooner die than lose the old farm. You've been in a bad way for money—defaulted on last year's taxes. And you've been trying to sell the State Highway Department a strip of your land so they could put in this overhead road crossing. Should they buy from you, you'd step right off your hot spot, wouldn't you? And of course, the more crack-ups happen here, the more likelihood of having the crossing changed soon."

DR. COBB rose and looked at Jeb with a smile on his friendly face. "Jeb—you're a hell of a poor taxi-driver. You've run an awful risk. Now, here's a little bit of news I picked up today before I came out here—talking to Billy Thomas, who's home from the State Legislature. The job's all in the bag now, and the change is to be made at once. They'll be out here to talk price with you this week."

He glanced at his watch.

"This business of yours has put a lot of innocent people on a mighty hot spot, Jeb. Just dumb luck that some one wasn't crippled or even killed. And any jury in this county would blister the living hide off you."

He paused sternly.

"More than once in the last twenty-five years I've had to be lawyer, judge, jury and all. Pronounced more than one death-sentence, too. No use sending you to jail. You're an old man, and a fine old friend as well. But I'm going to fine you, myself, just the same. You can easily spare five hundred dollars when your land's paid for, and chip in on this new hospital drive. That would help fix up several motor accidents."

Jeb's bony old hand held Dr. Cobb's, gratefully.

"But as soon as it's dark, slide out there and get that mirror and the other gadgets the hell out of there while the getting's good. Sergeant McCreedy and a couple more of the troop are coming in to my office tonight about eight-thirty to figure some way to stop this funny stuff. Be seeing you again soon, / So long, old-timer."

Three-Piece Dollar

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

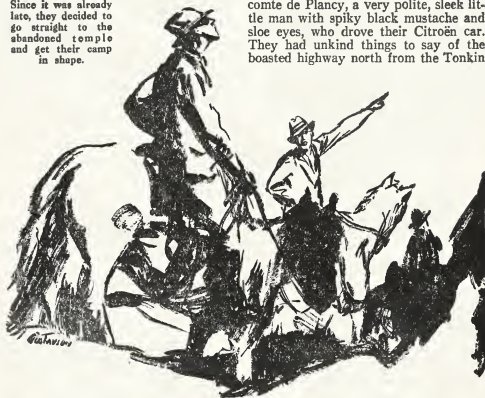
ERSKINE was one of those men who—even as you and I—are not what they seem.

He had been sent up from Singapore to manage the Gomorrah mine; he knew tin-mining, spoke Malay and Chinese, and looked just the sort of man to be imposed upon. He was small, wore spectacles; his sandy hair was usually mussed, his freckled nose turned up a bit, and he had a serious, practical expression. The mine was three days north of Yunnan City, and he had no objection

gorgeous time each month-end when he came down to Yunnan City. The foreign colony liked him. It developed that he had the most amazing knowledge about all sorts of things, and he could dance superbly. Also, he began to enlarge the production of the mine before he had been there three months; so all in all, he was a distinct acquisition, at least, among those who knew him well.

Calverly did not know him well, of course. The big, drawling, handsome blond Englishman turned up in Yunnan City one day, accompanied by the Vicomte de Plancy, a very polite, sleek little man with spiky black mustache and sloe eyes, who drove their Citroën car. They had unkind things to say of the boasted highway north from the Tonkin

Since it was already late, they decided to go straight to the abandoned temple and get their camp in shape.



to being stuck up there in the hills by himself with the mine and its village of Chinese workmen.

Erskine was unmarried, said briefly that he had no time to waste on social affairs, and disproved it by having a

border, and the car was laid up for repairs. Since Plancy was an authentic vicomte and Calverly a pleasant and plausible fellow, and Yunnan had the reputation of being the most hospitable of all Chinese cities, things went well.

The manager of a tin-mine in the interior of China runs into a strange adventure — by the able author of "The Bamboo Jewel," "Madagascar Gold" and many others.



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



peering through his spectacles. Calverly put out his hand, eagerness beaming in his face.

"Calverly, J. R. C. Calverly. My dear fellow, you're the one man up here I've been most anxious to meet! Heard of you at Singapore and at Trengganu. You were with the Consolidated people down there, eh? They told me you were one of the best tin experts in the field. I've a letter of introduction to you, somewhere in my luggage. We'll have it out."

Erskine was embarrassed by this flattery. He was tired and dirty and hungry, and had a sack of mail to run through; he was sitting clad in spectacles and shorts, glancing over the stack of letters, when M. de Mersuay, whose position corresponded to that of freight-agent for the French railroad running up from Haiphong, dropped in to see him about tin shipments. When their business was over, Erskine inquired about Calverly.

"An amiable gentleman," said Mersuay, fingering his chin-tuft. "With him came the Vicomte de Plancy, of the lesser nobility. I do not know their business here, but it is said that they are interested in mining concessions."

"Plancy is well known?" inquired Erskine.

"Of a certainty. He resigned recently from the Annamese Customs; I do not know the reasons. He is not, perhaps, too scrupulous in minor details," Mersuay hesitated. "Still, who knows? Gossip amounts to nothing. One must form his own conclusions."

"Exactly," said Erskine, ruffling up his sandy hair.

The two of them put up at the Hotel Terminus and were still there a fortnight later when Erskine arrived for his regular monthly visit. Calverly was at the desk when he strode in and asked for his regular room.

"Beg pardon," said Calverly. "You're not Erskine of the Gomorrah mine, by any chance?"

"The same, the same," said Erskine,

"How long shall you be with us this trip?" inquired the other.

"A week at least," said Erskine. "Who knows?"

He dined that evening with Calverly, and met the Vicomte, who was also at the club. . . .

During the three days following, Erskine saw a good deal of both Calverly and Plancy, who opened out their affairs to him very frankly.

It was true that they had a mining concession in mind, and were thinking of taking over a silver mine in the hills east of the city. Erskine was only too glad to impart any information at his command, and they questioned him at length in regard to the various details of mine-operation under the existing and constantly changing laws promulgated by the Yunnan governor, the supply of native labor, and so on.

ON the fourth day, while Erskine was lunching at the club with Doctor Aintree, talking hospital procedure and enjoying the view over the lake, Calverly dropped in upon them and plumped himself down at their table. He was in high excitement.

"Everything's arranged—the red tape and all that rot," he announced, beaming. "The governor approved the arrangements this morning. I say, Erskine! Plancy and I are putting everything we can raise into this concession, you know. I've had a bit of experience, and so has he, and we can carry on once we're started; but getting started is the rub. I'd jolly well hate to get off on the wrong foot, and you're the very man to help us out."

"Yes?" said Erskine. "In what way?"

"Advice," responded Calverly. "I'd like frightfully, old chap, to get your opinion of the ground we have in mind."

"Afraid my opinion isn't worth much," said Erskine, looking embarrassed.

"Nonsense! You're the one expert up here. You know, this Black Dragon mine is a long day's ride from here, up toward Sinfan-chow. With the preliminaries settled, we're going up day after tomorrow to take a look at the property before signing the papers. We've got guides, and we'll take along a few chop-boxes and a couple of boys. What about going with us? You can name your own fee and all that; it'll take two days of your time, more likely three, as we'd have to be there the best part of a day."

Erskine ran his fingers through his unruly sandy hair.



"Get up!" came the order in Chinese. "Keep your hands in the air. Quick!"

"I don't know, Calverly," he said slowly. "Afraid I couldn't take the responsibility of such a thing. If anything went wrong—"

"Bosh!" struck in Doctor Aintree, who liked Erskine and knew his abilities. "Weren't you telling me that you'd put in two years up in the Honan silver district? Ye know verra well, John Erskine, that ye've not your equal as a mineralogist in all south China! It'll do no harm to give an opinion."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Calverly eagerly. "You'd have no responsibility, old chap; an opinion on the silver veins is what we're after. Plancy would take my say-so, but we should have an unbiased verdict from an outsider. Don't be moldy, Erskine. Say yes, like a good fellow!"

Erskine smiled in his bashful, awkward way.

"Well, I suppose so," he said. "But I'd not be charging any fee, Calverly; that's out of the question. I couldn't draw my salary and be doing odd jobs on the side, you know."

The big Englishman clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"Right! I say, you're a good egg, and we'll appreciate it, let me tell you! Besides, you speak Chinese far better than I; these local dialects are the devil and all! Plancy can't waggle 'em worth a farthing, and we can't trust these native interpreters."

"To tell the truth," confessed Erskine, his eyes twinkling, "I've heard about that Black Dragon mine and have meant to take a look at it for my own people, but I never got around to it. Think you can trust me?"

Calverly looked at him and grinned, as he put forth a hand.

"Absolutely. It's a bargain. Shake!"

Erskine shook hands, looking a bit confused, and Calverly jovially called for a drink all around to celebrate.

"If you change your mind about the fee, don't hesitate to say so!" he exclaimed. "I'll drop in on you in the morning, as soon as we've perfected arrangements. I understand we can use horses, as the trails are good. Deuced good thing. I abominate these mountain mules!"

He departed, having an engagement to lunch with others, and Erskine gave the Doctor a whimsical glance.

"There I go," he murmured. "Three days among the hills, instead of enjoying life here! And if they buy the property and go bust, they'll blame me."

"Not a bit of it," said Aintree stoutly.



"Good sportsmen, both of them. I've heard the Vicomte well spoken of; he's a polo enthusiast, and that means a good deal. I can't say I cotton to Calverly particularly, but don't ye borrow trouble. Be frank, and shame the devil!"

Erskine laughed, and reverted to hospital topics.

On the following morning Calverly and Plancy found him in his room. The Vicomte was a vivacious and engaging companion, always very courteous, but full of high spirits; he had a heavy Bourbon jaw, and his black eyes were always flitting about. He expressed his delight that Erskine had consented to give an opinion, in well-chosen terms that left Erskine looking more awkward than ever.

"That's quite all right," he rejoined.

"What about arrangements?"

"All settled," boomed big Calverly. "There's no rest-house up there, but we'll put up at an abandoned hill-temple a mile or so from the location. I say, Erskine—no bandits around here, I suppose?"

Erskine shrugged. "Off and on, yes. They don't bother foreigners, though; no

anti-foreign feeling in Yunnan. And the Government has things pretty well in hand here. We have about the safest province in China, I understand."

"Hello!" Calverly looked at the table where Erskine had been at work. "Experiments? You're not drinking spirits, I hope? Not neat, at any rate."

Erskine glanced at the bottle of alcohol, and laughed.

"No," he said with a whimsical expression. "I always seem to get stuck, somehow. Last night it was bad dollars—at least, I think they're bad. I was about to try 'em out. Would it interest you? Here, look at them. The chops are Canton, but Canton's quite a way off."

HE picked up two Mexican dollars and the other men drew up to examine the coins. Owing to the prevalence of bad money in China, silver dollars are usually stamped with the chop of money-changers, the chop serving as guarantee. In Canton, this chop is applied with a steel die, the use of which, after a time, defaces the coin itself and changes its shape.

"What makes you think these are

bad?" asked the Vicomte with interest. "They look good enough."

"They don't ring true," said Erskine, pouring alcohol into a shallow dish. "Did you ever hear of three-piece dollars? I fancy we have a couple of them right here. Drop in yours, Calverly."

The Englishman dropped the dollar from his hand into the dish. Erskine struck a match and touched off the alcohol.

"It's almost incredible to what lengths of labor and time these Chinese will go, for the sake of a few cents' worth of silver," he said, his eyes sparkling with animation as he watched the bluish flame dancing up. "A striking commentary on the cheapness of labor, too. Wait till I get a glass of water—that stuff will be too hot to touch."

He obtained the water, and when the flame of the alcohol died out, poured in the water and cooled off the coin. He picked it up, and it fell apart.

"I say!" exclaimed Calverly with interest. "Three-piece dollars, eh! Good name for it, too—"

"Yes, I always get stuck," said Erskine plaintively, but with a chuckle none the less. "Here you are. Look, Plancy! The face of the dollar has been removed, the silver scooped out and replaced with brass to give it the proper weight; then the coin was soldered together again. Apparently pure silver and correct weight. Melt it apart, and you have two faces of silver, and a neat little chunk of brass. Oddly enough, the chunk of brass is the only one of the three pieces that isn't false—there's a paradox for you!"

His visitors gone, Erskine returned, picked up the "three-piece dollar" and inspected the fragments with a slow smile, as though he saw more in them than two hollow faces of silver and a little chunk of brass. . . .

The three got off in the morning, taking along a guide, two servants, and a couple of spare horses loaded with chop-boxes of provisions. All three Chinese had been furnished by the hotel and were reliable, steady fellows.

Until noon they followed the main caravan highway toward Sinfan, then struck off by a narrower but fair enough road into the hills. Erskine, once afeld, lost his shyness and became a different person, talking volubly, interested in everything around. Neither he nor the Vicomte carried rifles, but Calverly had borrowed a shotgun from the British con-

sul, in the hope of knocking over a pheasant or two. An hour after they branched from the highway, he bagged a brace without leaving the road, and was the happiest of men in consequence.

Erskine found that the Vicomte was a true Frenchman, on the head of business; he had a shrewd grasp of detail, boasted of his influence with the colonial administration, and was an open admirer of the Gomorrah mine. His knowledge of it, indeed, somewhat surprised Erskine. True, the mine was owned by a Singapore syndicate, and it was an exceedingly wealthy property, but Plancy had a more intimate acquaintance with its earnings and reports than Erskine himself. Which, of course, merely went to prove his business acumen.

The afternoon was far advanced when they came up the winding valley trail leading to the Hei Lung, or Black Dragon, mine and village. Their guide halted at a fork in the trail, and informed them that the main road went on to the village and mine, the right fork going directly to the temple and spring a mile from it.

Since it was already late, and they must make habitable the abandoned temple, it was decided to go straight to the latter and get their camp in shape, and inspect the mining property in the morning. Twenty minutes later they sighted their destination.

THE beauty of the site was astonishing. In the depth of a hillside nook whence gushed forth a bubbling, plunging stream of the clearest water, an ancient and half-ruined temple was overhung by the trees. The graceful arched approach and stone-paved terrace, with guardian lanterns of stone, were perfect. The building behind was largely ruined and the images of the gods had departed, but a portion of the central hall could be cleared in short order, and the roof-tiles were in place.

All hands fell to work, the horses being hobbled to graze behind the temple; the guide departed for the village, where he had friends, and the two servants put up the folding table in the terrace and laid out the evening meal. It was ready by the time the three had cleared enough of the central hall to hold their blankets; there were no reptiles or insects of any sort, and when finished, they enjoyed a quick bath in the crystal-clear waters of the spring, which was famed for its purity. They sat down to supper, in the sunset, feeling like new men.



"If any tricks are tried—" He gestured significantly with a palm across his throat.

Afterward, when the cold stars had appeared overhead and the chill mountain air made their blazing fire a cheery and delightful thing, they sat about the blaze and smoked, and became human as men will at such moments. When, later, he looked back at these hours and recalled the jovial fellowship of Calverly, and the urbane, half-cynical philosophy voiced by Plancy, and their rather intimate confidences, Erskine could not but feel a bewildered wonder at the intricacies of life, and the possibilities of human nature.

The three at last abandoned the dying fire to the two servants, and rolled up in their blankets. Erskine lay awake for a long while, a little resentful at coming here to this uncomfortable bed on the cold stones, when the village would at least have afforded them a house and more

creature comforts; for Erskine did not enjoy roughing it in the least. Also, the hearty snores of Calverly disturbed him.

The temple was built in the ancient fashion, exactly as skyscrapers of today are built—of great ironwood beams in skeleton structure, filled in and masked by stone walls. The stones, on the interior, were dotted here and there by phosphorescent fungi; and Erskine eyed these as he lay in the darkness. Various Chinese legends recurred to his mind in regard to such lichens and their supernatural and baleful attributes. After a bit, without disturbing his companions, he rose and slipped outside. Lighting a cigarette, he gazed out across the dark starlit hills until his uneasiness had worn away and he was chilled; then, returning to his blankets gratefully, he rolled up, and was asleep in five minutes.

WHEN he wakened, a blinding ray of light was striking directly in his eyes.

He came to one elbow, blinking. The ray of light came from an electric torch; outside, he caught a shrill chattering of frightened Chinese voices, silenced by a curt, harsh command. Then he realized that he was being kicked, and he sat up hurriedly.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed. "It isn't daylight yet—"

His voice died out. At one side he saw Calverly and the Vicomte standing, their hands in the air. The flashlight was held by a figure standing over him, who reached forward and patted his pockets, glanced at his belt, found no weapon and stepped back a pace.

"Get up!" came the order in Chinese. "Join these other two foreign devils. Keep your hands in the air. Quick!"

"Better toe the line, old chap," came the voice of Calverly. "This fellow seems to mean business, and I fancy he's got our boys attended to, outside. Seems to have a nasty temper, the blighter! Feels as though he'd kicked a couple of my ribs loose."

Indeed, blood showed on the lips of Calverly; evidently he had offered resistance. Erskine, who had slept without removing anything but his boots, pulled them on and then struggled to his feet, still bewildered.

Other men came into the room, bearing lanterns. Like their leader, they were Chinese, and wore ragged khaki uniforms. In a flash, Erskine realized they must be bandits, probably soldiers

who had deserted and taken to the hills. The leader, a squat, broad-faced man, gave a curt command.

"Tie their hands behind them."

The others, four in all, obeyed, one keeping his rifle trained on the whites, while his comrades bound their arms together. Erskine was wide awake by this time, and made urgent protest to the leader.

"You will be severely punished for this outrage—"

One of the men struck him across the mouth with a curt order for silence. The Vicomte shrugged, and Calverly grinned in resignation.

FROM outside came a wailing cry, then a shriek of agony, followed by harsh voices. The two servants were dragged into the room by other men, and the leader turned to them and began an interrogation. Bleeding, terrorized, the servants answered his questions without reserve, telling who Erskine was, and who the others were. The leader gave an order, and the two were dragged out. Then he turned to the three whites, strode up to them, stared at them with hard and glittering eyes.

"I am Chang Chin," he said calmly, speaking slowly, that they might understand perfectly. "I heard that you were coming to look at the Black Dragon mine. You expect to buy it. However, I do not like foreign devils. Two of you came here to buy the mine; instead, you shall buy freedom. One of you already has a rich mine; it shall buy his freedom. If not, you shall die. Do you understand?"

"Well enough," answered Erskine, at a nod from the Englishman. "You are a bandit, I suppose? None of us are rich men—"

"I am not here to argue," cut in Chang Chin with level finality, "but to give you my orders. You,"—and he thrust his finger at Erskine,—"*will remain here.* One of the others will remain. The third will go to Yunnan City in half an hour. He will reach there in the afternoon. On the next day at noon, he will come alone, with the money, to the point where the road for this place leaves the highway. He will bring twenty thousand dollars in bank-notes for the freedom of his companion, and another twenty thousand for the freedom of this man who mines tin. My men will be on the watch. If he does not come alone, if soldiers leave Yunnan City, the two who remain will

be killed at once. We shall not stay here, in any case, so it would be very foolish to send soldiers; I would not be found, and the other two would be killed. And remember, I mean gold dollars, not Mexican dollars."

"You will be hunted down later," said Erskine. "You cannot escape. The whole province will be roused against you; the frontiers will be closed."

Chang Chin regarded him fixedly. "If you utter any more threats, foreign devil, I will send one of your ears to Yunnan City with your friend. You will have half an hour to decide which one of you departs. Arrange it yourselves."

Bidding two of his men to remain at the door on guard, and to watch the foreign devils closely, he strode out—a compact, businesslike, unhurried man who would obviously carry out his threats to the letter.

Calverly sat down, stretched his arms in their bonds, and laughed.

"My word! This is a ruddy go, what? Erskine, did I understand that either I or Plancy takes the message to García?" Erskine grunted. "Yes."

Seated on the blankets, they stared one at another for a moment.

"But—but this is something formidable!" burst out the Vicomte, in a sudden passionate flood of speech. Words rushed from him; he cursed, reproached himself, poured out a torrent of invective of excited protest. "It is an impossible sum—twenty thousand dollars gold, for each of us!"

"No," said Calverly. "Remember, we have over fifteen thousand between us, Plancy."

"But it will strip us!" cried the Frenchman, aghast. Calverly merely shrugged.

"Fortunes of war, old chap. Erskine here—his mine will put up for him. The British and French consuls will make up what we lack. Which of us goes?"

They argued about it, while the gray dawn lightened into sunrise. The Vicomte resolved to plead with Chang Chin to lessen the ransom demanded, and he called to the guards. One of them came, grinning, and escorted him outside.

"No use, but let him try it," said Calverly. Erskine nodded.

"By all means. How's your side?"

"Eh?" Calverly glanced at him. "Oh, my ribs? Quite all right, thanks. I suppose that rascal will steal the shotgun, eh?"

"Undoubtedly." Erskine blinked and

reached out his bound hands for his spectacles. With some effort he got them adjusted. "He hasn't robbed us; that's a blessing."

Calverly laughed. "What do a few dollars matter, when he expects to get forty thousand? Will your company come through?"

"Very likely," said Erskine.

"Lucky beggar!"

Erskine did not respond. He admired the phlegmatic calm of the Englishman, and wondered whether even a pair of broken ribs would have altered it. He spoke up and addressed the remaining soldier, asking the latter to get out his cigarettes for him and light one. The man came over to them and complied, taking a cigarette himself and then pocketing the case with a laughing jest.

"Do you come from this province?" Erskine asked him.

"Yes," said the man. "We are from the governor's army, and this is better than a life of drill! Especially, as you will soon make us all rich."

Now, there are all kinds of dialects, particularly in Yunnan, and in the course of his life here Erskine had gone into the matter quite thoroughly. When Chang Chin had addressed them, he had spotted the bandit leader's dialect as tinged with Annamese expressions and intonation. This soldier showed the same peculiarity, proof positive that neither of them were Yunnan men.

Erskine relapsed into thoughtful silence, unobservant of the glances Calverly bent upon him from time to time. Presently the Vicomte was brought back, cursing luridly. Chang Chin had refused any compromise, and their time was up. One must depart at once.

"You go, then," said Calverly calmly. "Your consul can wangle the governor into doing nothing. Don't let him start out a few regiments of troops to find us; no use in being found with a slit throat. Eh, Erskine?"

"Correct, of course," said Erskine. "No doubt about it, this bandit will keep his word. We'd better send in letters by you, Plancy. I'll send a code wire to my company in Singapore, and you can get a reply right off."

"Never thought of that!" exclaimed Calverly, with a loud laugh. "Excellent idea! But we can't write with our arms bound—"

Chang Chin entered with several of his men. Broad daylight had broken by this time. The bandit approved the sugges-

tion at once, ordered the three unbound, and they secured writing materials from their still unplundered effects. Calverly dashed off a note, and Erskine carefully wrote out a telegram in code, to be forwarded to Singapore. The Vicomte took these, shook hands, and was escorted out.

At an order from Chang Chin, Erskine and Calverly were again bound, and a cloth was wrapped about their eyes. Then they were led outside, aided to get into the saddle, and presently went riding away, with the chattering, laughing voices of men around them. Not, as Erskine noted, the voices of Yunnan men. . . .

NOON found the two captives unbound, confined in a grass-thatched forest hut with their few belongings, two rifle-armed guards stationed constantly at the door. Chang Chin and the eight men who composed his bandit following were encamped in the open, beside the hut. The jungle clearing was walled about by trees and giant vines. The horses grazed near by; Erskine estimated they had been a good hour getting here, and Calverly agreed.

"An hour at least, perhaps more. Well, what's the odds, old chap? If Plancy does the business, we'll be free tomorrow."

Erskine merely nodded, having become rather taciturn. It was odd, he reflected, that their chop-boxes and their personal effects had not been looted; their two servants had disappeared entirely. Chang Chin had forbidden them to talk with the guards. Erskine noted that the bandit leader was neglecting no precautions, having stationed sentries out on the trail leading to the clearing.

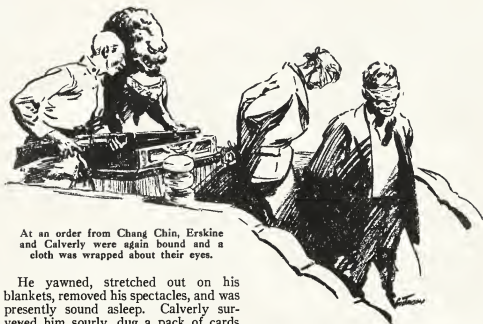
"It's a well-planned job, what?" said Calverly, mouthing his pipe. "The blighter knew we were coming here—said as much. He's in touch with somebody in Yunnan City, of course; all these outlaws have a spy system."

"I think you're right," said Erskine dryly.

Calverly gave him a sharp look.

"Eh? Yes, of course. Yunnan City will be in uproar tonight, what? Cable stories going out, no end. Consular officials buzzing around, and what-not. If Plancy gets us back safe, there'll be a reception committee and a banquet. Popular heroes, eh?"

"The prospect is distasteful," said Erskine. "I think I'll take a nap, if you don't mind."



At an order from Chang Chin, Ersine and Calverly were again bound and a cloth was wrapped about their eyes.

He yawned, stretched out on his blankets, removed his spectacles, and was presently sound asleep. Calverly surveyed him sourly, dug a pack of cards from his belongings, and began a solitaire game. . . .

The hours dragged on. The afternoon was nearly over when Ersine awakened, sat up and donned his spectacles, and found Calverly dozing. The two guards at the entrance were alert and vigilant, he perceived.

Ersine lit a cigarette. Then, sitting humped over, his hand stole in under his left armpit and caressed the slender, flat automatic that was slung there. The touch of it gave him security and confidence. Calverly did not know he had it, and Chang Chin had not discovered it in his hurried search. That the weapon might well prove useful, Ersine knew very well, but he was not talking about it.

As darkness approached, Calverly and Ersine rummaged in the chop-boxes, produced biscuit and sardines, and made a fairly satisfactory meal. Now, as at noon, one of the guards shambled in with a gourd full of clear cold water, although there was no stream in sight. Ersine tasted it, smiled a little, and made no comment.

"You're taking this affair dashed coolly, old chap," observed Calverly, when their meal was finished, and tobacco-smoke rose gray upon the twilight.

"Why not?" said Ersine with a shrug. "You are too. Will the loss hit you hard?"

"Clean sweep," said the Englishman cheerfully. "Don't mind saying that most of our capital was mine."

"Oh!" said Ersine. "You'll have to give up the concession, eh?"

"Absolutely! Plancy had six or eight hundred pounds in the pool, all he had. Poor chap—he'd saved up for years. You know how these Frenchmen are."

"Yes. How long have you known him?"

"About a month before we came up here. I ran into him down in Annam, where we played a bit of polo, and then he chucked his job, and we went in for a shooting-trip." Calverly grinned over his pipe. "We chucked that when we heard about this Black Dragon mine that was going begging up here. Looked it up, then sold out my share in a rubber plantation, and here we are."

ERSKINE glanced at the empty water-gourd, and changed the subject.

"We're not so far from our temple," he said reflectively. "We were taken uphill for a time, then halted, then went downhill; I could tell by the pitch of the saddle. This water we've been drinking is from the Black Dragon spring. Same taste. We were brought back close to our deserted temple."

"Eh? Perhaps you're right!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Look here, what price trying to get away tonight?"

Ersine shook his head decidedly.

"I'm no fighting man, Calverly," he said. "And it couldn't be done—these beggars keep an eye on us all the time. I've thought of it; we'd be fools to try

it. My company will have the money paid over, and it's much better to lose the money than be cut up."

"Oh, quite so," admitted Calverly with a disappointed air. "I suppose you're right, dash it! What's that you have there?"

One of the guards had brought in a lamp as darkness drew down. Erskine had drawn out an envelope and dumped down three pieces of metal, and was playing with them reflectively.

"Three-piece dollar," he rejoined laconically, and went on fingering the two silver dollar-faces, and the thin, glittering nugget of brass, moving them about on his blankets as though playing some abstruse game with the varying combinations of the three objects. After a time he glanced up.

"You gave Plancy authority to get your joint money?"

"Yes, of course. It's all in the hotel safe, in drafts on Saigon. The Banque Industrielle in Yunnan will cash 'em."

"And my company will order the bank to hand over cash, too. All right, then—Plancy can get the cash without trouble. And he's wise enough to come alone, or with a guide."

Calverly nodded. "Don't worry. The authorities won't interfere. They know it's best to obey orders when dealing with these bandit chappies. They may indemnify us later on, eh?"

Erskine shrugged and went on playing with the fragments of his three-piece dollar, smiling a little to himself as he moved them about. A stir at the door; and he looked up to see Chang Chin striding in. The bandit regarded them and spoke curtly.

"Go to sleep now, foreign devils. A couple of hours past midnight, we leave here to reach the appointed place. I shall take you with me. If the money is paid over, you shall go free and join your friend. If any tricks are tried—"

He gestured significantly, a sweep of his palm across his throat, and strode out again. Calverly looked at Erskine and chuckled.

"Let's hope Plancy doesn't try any tricks, what?"

"He won't," said Erskine, and swept the three-piece dollar back into its envelope. "I think I'll write a short note before we turn in—where's that pencil? Thanks."

He scribbled briefly on a scrap of paper, thrust it into the envelope, and pocketed the latter, with a satisfied air.

THE Vicomte de Plancy, upon reaching Yunnan City, became the center of a whirlpool reaching out to all financial, diplomatic and news-gathering circles of the provincial capital. The palace of the governor leaped into commotion, and consular officials dashed madly about hither and yon. Through it all, the coolest heads were those of Plancy and of the grim old governor, who was quite aware that a false move would mean the death of the captives.

That the treasury of the state would be called upon to indemnify the foreigners, was immediately made clear; and the governor agreed without hesitation. He went into consultation with the Vicomte and the assembled consuls, and Plancy's very fair proposal was accepted. The banks there would put up the money, as the Gomorrah people in Singapore had agreed by wire to pay their end, and if Plancy returned safe with his two companions, the governor would at once indemnify the expended sums. If unfortunate fatalities resulted, there would be large claims for indemnities, which would have to be paid; otherwise, not. It was a very good bargain for the governor, who thus escaped vexatious foreign claims, and Vicomte de Plancy was the object of many congratulations for having thought of the agreement.

As old Doctor Aintree put it, no one suffered at all except the Yunnan treasury, and everyone benefited; which was as it should be. If the governor permitted bandits to exist in his borders, he ought to pay for the luxury.

NO objection was raised in any quarter to obeying the instructions of the astute Chang Chin, and early next morning Vicomte de Plancy departed with a guide and the money. Since he would be back before nightfall, a celebration was arranged by the foreign colony, and showers of hearty best wishes followed him as he rode forth. The guide who went with him was in reality an agent of the governor's, and a very high official, though he did not look it.

An hour before noon, the two of them reached the branch road leaving the highway for the Black Dragon village and mine.

As they turned into the road, a curt voice from the trees bade them halt, and Chang Chin himself rode out, pistol in hand, to meet them.

"Have you brought the money, foreign devil?" he demanded.

"I have it," said the Vicomte promptly. "The whole sum, in cash."

"Good. Come with me and get your friends, who are close by. Your guide can wait here until you return. It will not be long. And pay me the money as we go."

The Vicomte handed over the little sealed package, containing notes of large denominations. Chang Chin broke it open, then turned his horse around, beckoned to the Vicomte, and moved on up the road, inspecting the money the while.

Calverly and Erskine, who had been halted with most of the bandits around them, saw their companion return with Chang Chin. The Vicomte waved his hand to them, but the bandit ordered his men to horse, then turned to the three.

"Go," he said. "I should kill all three of you foreign devils, but I will keep my word. You are free."

He put in spurs and went away at a gallop, his men streaming after him as fast as they could mount and ride.

The three shook hands warmly. Vicomte de Plancy was eager, vivacious, bubbling over with delight. He told of the guide awaiting them, told of the man's real position.

"Undoubtedly he's reporting to the governor," he exclaimed. "You see, my friend? It is good news! We do not lose our money. The governor must repay us—we shall lose nothing at all!"

CALVERLY, wildly delighted, smote Erskine lustily on the back, and swung up into the saddle, for two horses had been left them. The three set out for the highway, Vicomte de Plancy telling excitedly of what had transpired at Yunnan City.

"So you paid over the money, eh?" said Erskine.

"And you should have seen him counting it!" Plancy broke into a laugh. "He had never seen *billets* of such a size, eh? Well, my friends, I am overjoyed! It has been a strain, let me tell you. Most people thought the bandit would take the money and then kill us all. Pough! I knew the rascal would keep his word."

"Yes?" said Erskine dryly. "I believe you did."

"Eh?" The Vicomte darted him a glance, thumbed the spikes of his waxed mustache, and frowned slightly. "Eh? Your meaning, my friend?"

They had come within sight of the guide, who walked his horse toward them.

Erskine drew rein, and slipped his hand under his coat.

"Plancy!" His voice had a sudden edge of steel. "Hands up—quick!"

The little automatic leaped out, flat and ugly in the sunlight. The Vicomte's jaw fell, and slowly he put up his arms.

"Is this a joke, my friend?" he asked. "No," said Erskine. "Calverly! Wake up, man, wake up! Search him—look through his coat pockets! Go through that saddle-bag of his!"

"Stop!" cried out the Vicomte, his face contorted by anger. "This is an outrage, this is beyond belief—"

"Shut up!" snapped Erskine. "You fool, I saw through the whole thing! Go on and search him, Calverly. You'll understand quick enough."

Calverly hesitated, then dipped into the Vicomte's coat pocket and produced a slender packet of bank-notes.

FIVE minutes later, packet after packet had been produced, from pockets of the Vicomte and from his saddle-bag. Pale, furious, helpless, he stood in silence while Calverly and the impassive yellow guide ran over the amounts.

"You'd better slip off and join your Annamese friends," said Erskine, "before our English comrade begins to thrash you—he appears to be considering it. Quick! Any of your own money that's left after paying expenses will be handed over to your consulate—you can claim it at will. And here's a little present for you, a departing gift, as it were—"

He thrust an envelope into the Vicomte's hand, just as Calverly turned from the heap of bank-note packets, with a roar of gathering rage.

The Vicomte de Plancy took one look at the Englishman's face, then made a tremendous leap, gained his saddle again, and thrust in his spurs. He was gone like the wind, with the bellowing curses of Calverly pursuing him. At a safe distance he slowed down sufficiently to tear open the envelope Erskine had given him.

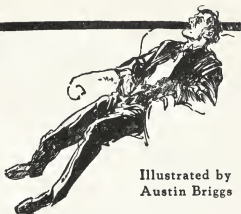
Into his hand fell the fragments of the three-piece dollar, and a sheet of paper bearing the brief scrawl:

"There is another moral, my friend. The two faces may be hollowed out, but after all they remain silver. The brass is nothing but brass. I trust you did not pay Chang Chin too much for his work?"

With a chattering scream of inarticulate rage, the Vicomte flung the note and the metal into the road, and drove in his spurs like a madman.

*A memorable story of the
Free Lances in Diplomacy.*

By CLARENCE
HERBERT NEW



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

Six Who Could Think

BANNISTER had stepped into one of the House committee-rooms for a smoke and a chat with three friends before going in and taking his place on the Conservative benches. There was an atmosphere of tension in the Chamber from the fact that one of the more extreme Radical leaders was going to propose drastic legislation about which even some of his own party were a bit doubtful. Bannister had been asked by the Speaker to rise and reply for the Government because he had an unerring faculty for seeing the weak points in an opponent's statements and showing them up so clearly that there wasn't much left to argue over when he had finished. With him as he came into the committee-room were the Marquess of Lyonesse, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, and Charlton—one of the Conservative whips. The leader was looking exceptionally fit—said he never felt more clear-headed.

Suddenly Lammerford, who had been discussing something with him, noticed a peculiar expression flash across the man's face. He stumbled a bit in what he was saying, then stopped, with an apprehensive look—so apprehensive, in fact, that the Earl couldn't help asking: "What's wrong, old chap—feeling a bit pipped?"

"Why, nothing of any consequence, I fancy—sorry it was noticeable! Er—you were sayin'—"

Then the color drained out of his face. "Now—wait a bit, man! There's something wrong with you, an' you look it! Let's get busy—at once!"

"Dev'lish sorry to be such a nuisance, you know—all that! But—feels as if every wheel of the inside machinery had suddenly stopped—rotten sensation of faintness. I say! Fear I'll have to have a spot of attention—the thing's gettin' worse! Would Your Lordship mind gettin' through on the phone to Sir John Frobisher—my medico—ask him to come here at once."

The other two men had stepped up to see what was the trouble. There was no question as to the man's being seriously ill—and the Marquess quietly picked up one of the telephones from the table. When Sir John hurried in, fifteen minutes after Lammerford had talked to him, Bannister was a bit better, thanks to prompt first-aid measures which they had taken. And an hour later, after the physician had worked over him with all his skill, Bannister was able to talk.

"NOW tell me as closely as may be, exactly how you felt inside when this attack commenced," Sir John directed.

Bannister described his symptoms. "Where did you dine—an' what had you for dinner?" asked the physician. This was dealt with in detail. "Now who were the other guests—an' what servants came into the dining-room?"

"Well, I fancy I can give you all the names—but I don't see just what bearing that can possibly have upon this attack of mine!"

"Don't you, now? Well—you wouldn't, of course. That's one of the points which makes these cases a bit intriguing just

now. How could a man be given what you prob'ly got, at a dinner-party with personal friends? Absurd, isn't it? Now listen to me, Bannister. You came to me three weeks ago for a bit of overhaulin'—an' got it. You were sound as a nut; eatin' with comfort just about everything. Tonight—presumably because of your speech—you eat the simplest, most abstemious dinner you've had in months, leaving before the dessert, an' get an attack which might easily have carried you off, though you never had anything like it before in your life. What's the answer? We can thank the Marquess that you're alive now! Gentlemen, you will recall the death of another Member from the same cause two months ago? Sir George Worrall also was slated to rise an' speak against certain proposed legislation—an' he had the documents to block it. But he was stricken on the floor of the House, an' died before they could get a prescription filled for him. Was it coincidence or what? —How are you feeling now, Bannister? Fit enough to speak in the House, tonight?"

"Why—perfectly, I'd say. And that's what I came here to do. Attack seems to have passed off."

"I'll look you over and make sure. My personal opinion is that you were not intended to speak this evening an' that whatever it was that got inside of you may prove to have a delayed kick that'll be comin' along later—so we'll just forestall that an' play safe. The whole thing may have come from natural causes—but I'll wager it didn't. An' I'll take your promise that the moment you've finished speakin' you'll come to my house with a guard of at least two of your friends—preferably in one of their cars. If the Marquess an' Lord Lammerford will permit us to impose upon them to that extent, I'd prefer them to anyone else, because there are features in your case and a few others which I'd like to go over with the three of you. Agreed?"

IT was another hour before Bannister felt quite up to taking his place on the benches, and he came in leaning upon Charlton's arm as if it were difficult for him to move at all. His absence had been noticed by everyone in the House, and rumors were going about that he had been stricken with heart-failure—that he had been shot—that he had mysteriously disappeared. In this tense situation, the Speaker had been rather apprehensive until one of the Members whispered to

him that Bannister was in the building and would be on the floor when the Radical proposition started. But when the man appeared, he looked so ill that it was not thought he would speak for more than a moment or two, or was up to any sort of debate; so it came as an overwhelming surprise when he gave one of the most subtle, masterly and unanswerable speeches of his life.

As soon as he had finished speaking, he left the Chamber while the reporters were feverishly telephoning their respective newspapers, and was driven to Sir John's house with the two peers, who were so interested in Frobisher's suspicions that they had dropped everything else for a time, in order to get the facts and conclusions which he seemed to have. They were shown into the physician's attractive study, where sandwiches, wine and tobacco were on a small table; Frobisher's butler said the physician should be in at any moment.

WHEN Sir John did come in he filled and lighted a big briar pipe, and sat smoking in silence for a few moments. Then he said:

"Several of my patients are Foreign Office men—and naturally, pretty close-mouthed. But one gets the impression from them that the Marquess an' Lord Lammerford know more of what has occurred in underground diplomacy an' politics these last twenty-five years and have sounder opinions on it than any other living men excepting old Scarpia in Rome—the Marchese di Soltaverno—so I've been wishing to discuss something with you which the average person would consider so far-fetched and impossible that my professional reputation would suffer from the supposition that I held such an idea. Very good! Let us consider certain occurrences toward which my attention has been directed in the last three months. I belong to the type of medico who is constantly studying; when I come across something which doesn't happen according to the laws governing my practice, it annoys me—I can't get it out of my mind. Certain things ought to happen under known conditions—but don't happen; other things should not happen under the usual conditions—but do happen. You follow me?"

"Quite, Sir John! We're constantly up against that in our experimentation at Trevor Hall. But to get on with your story, sir—"



"If those twenty-four men are killed, what will be the effect on Europe and the rest of the world?"

Frobisher nodded. "I mentioned to you this evening the case of Sir George Worrall who died two months ago in the House. He'd been examined a few weeks before for insurance and was absolutely sound—his heart should have stood up under almost anything without bein' affected. One week later, René Du Bois of the French Chamber was on his way from a dinner-party at Fontainebleau to an all-night session at which some pretty drastic legislation was coming up, when he was seized with one of these attacks as his car entered the city. He was driven to his Paris home, and his physician sent for. Medico had been called out on a confinement-case. By the time they got another man there, Du Bois was beyond help. Last month Paul Schirmer, of the 'Right' in the Reichstag, had been dining with a party of friends at the Adlon. He started for the Reichstag, but suddenly felt ill, and went home, instead. His physician, having found Schirmer sound as a nut shortly before, took the risk of assuming that nothing serious could be the matter with him; so he stopped to see another case on the way—and reached Schirmer fifteen minutes too late. With Worrall's case in

mind, I asked Captain Soames of the F. O. to dig up what he could from the French medico about Du Bois—and got another F. O. man to look into Schirmer's case. The French doctor reported the same findings as with Worrall and Bannister. The German said that with a heart and stomach as sound as Schirmer's the supposed cause of death 'was impossible'—even though the symptoms pointed that way. His verdict was some unknown vegetable poison from Asia which left no trace—an' I've been wondering if he mightn't have been right *both* ways? That German doctor is the only one of the three to state positively that it was something poisonous taken in with the man's food or drink which killed him—instead of natural causes."

"Did you analyze any of Bannister's food, Sir John?"

"I found a more rapid development of ptomaines than ever has been known to result from natural causes."

"Wait a bit—let me see if I get this! You found nothing which didn't appear to be entirely natural symptoms when normal digestion stops—nothing that would indicate foul play? But you did get a rapidity of ptomaine-development which never before has occurred in recorded pathology? Is that right?"



"I'll get in, and see if I can hide a dictaphone somewhere." The Earl disappeared without a sound.

"Exactly right, sir. And the same condition was found in each of the other cases. Now—keeping these four cases in mind—I'll ask you to consider some other data which at first may seem to have no bearing upon them. In every Parliam'nt or Congress or Chamber there are certain men who come to the front through sheer weight of intelligence an' thinking capacity. Some of them have the qualities of leadership and organization, but without all-round intelligence an' thinking ability. These we need not consider. But the top men would be the survivals of twenty or thirty years in political life—able to project their minds far enough in the future to know at once whether any proposed legislation would in the long run be destructive or beneficial. In short, they are able to think all round all of the others—being, for that reason, the most valuable men we have in public life. And I figure that there are not more than six of such men in every Parliament or Congress. Not by any means all in office at the same time—but all available for consultation at any time, whether they're in power today or in the background until a new Govern'm't is formed. Very good! We

now get down to the crux of the whole matter. The only parliam'ts in Europe which we need consider as having world-wide influence, are those of London, Paris, Rome and Berlin. Six super-thinking men in each, or twenty-four men whose lives and activities are invaluable—necess'ry to civilization. Now if those twenty-four men are killed, one way or another, what will be the effect upon Europe an' the rest of the world? Have we any others of the same caliber to replace them?"

"Oh, my word—those twenty-four are the very cream of all who have appeared in the last twenty years. Kill off the lot of them in six months, an' we'll have a mass of destructive legislation that it'll take the countries fifty years to recover from—if they do it in that time—prob'ly one or two revolutions as well!"

FROBISHER tapped the dottle from his pipe as he said meditatively:

"I fancied that would be your view. Well? Is there any question in your minds that the three men who died were *murdered*? Or that Bannister's case is deliberate attempted murder?"

The Marquess shook his head.

"With the data you have upon the four cases, Sir John—no question at all! And if a plot of that sort is actually workin' out at this moment, we'll see the whole twenty-four men go in a few months unless something is done to stop it. There are plenty of other imperceptible ways of killin' 'em besides this one. Push a little bubble of air into a man's circulation with a hypodermic—"

"Aye—but the needle-prick remains, showin' on his skin as a clue—stamps it as murder at once. They'll not chance that—they're in no great hurry. An' with these attacks like Bannister's they are safe—you couldn't prove any one of 'em as murder to a British jury. You may rest assured they'll try nothing which points suspicion in any direction as long as they have anything as good as this. That's why I fancy Bannister is safe from knife or bullet—but all the same, I'm going to send him out of the country for a few months an' see that he stays out until we can somehow pick up a clue as to who these murderers are. We've arbitrarily assumed six men in each parliam't as being the only real thinkers—but the assassins, d'ye see, can't very well go at it in that way. They must watch each of the prominent Members until they're dead sure of one

who is outplaying most of the others. Then they'll proceed to eliminate him—but they'll not run any risks to kill one who after he's addressed the House a few times may prove to be merely a dud."

"Did you by any chance manage to get the names of those who were at the four dinner-parties, Sir John?" Lammerford inquired.

"Aye. Not only the guests but all of the servants who might have had access to the food. Soames got the Paris an' Berlin data for me, d'ye see. My secretary made copies for each of you, just before you turned up here."

For a few moments there was an interval of silence during which the four men were concentrating upon the problem from various sides. Then the Marquess said reassuringly to Bannister:

"It really should be a cinch, old chap. Consider! Instead of having to trace and nab our murderers through a mass of thousands, we'll prob'ly find 'em within sixty or seventy persons—a hundred at the outside. They're some person or persons included in these lists of Sir John's; or if not, some one among the daily acquaintances of the victims who saw them not earlier than four p. m. on the days they died. That proposition ought, with what we already know of communist and soviet agents in London, to put our hands on the murderers in a month or two at the outside. The only baffling point was to establish the certainty that murder has been committed in this new and peculiar way. Without that, it might be almost hopeless—but the Doctor has settled that conclusively. As a matter of cold fact, the proposition is too damned serious to be put off for any further consideration—I fancy we must do a bit of diggin' at once. If your practice will permit of your workin' with us from time to time, Sir John, you'll be highly valuable. Seems to me that this is a case where some of the most efficient press-johnnies can help us out a good bit, in digging up personal facts about people. Lammerford and I are on most friendly terms with the manager of a big syndicate—one of the largest in Europe. So we'll just drop down to his digs and see which of his best men he can spare for this."

DRIVING east to Fleet Street and Red Lion Court, they ran under a couple of archways and stopped at a private entrance to the editorial rooms of the great press syndicate in which the Tre-

vors held a majority of the shares—finding the manager, Harley Greaves, in his office on the top floor. This office was accessible to his executives and star men, but the smaller one next to it was strictly private, having a trick door with a secret spring. On the farther side of this smaller office was another trick door giving access to a suite of five rooms including a luxurious bath, dining-room, living-room and two sleeping-rooms, the whole encased in a bomb-proof shell of steel two inches thick—the windows having double thicknesses of armor-glass and being protected on the outside by a netting of heavy steel wire. Greaves had his own suite beyond the farther side of his main office and never entered the other, which was always available for the owners. Tossing the lists of dinner-guests upon the manager's desk, the Marquess and Lammerford pulled up big chairs—then rapidly went over what had happened to Bannister in the committee-room and the previous deaths of the other three politicals, with Sir John Frobisher's investigations. After covering about everything, the Marquess asked Greaves if he had a man who seemed especially fitted for investigations both in the underworld and the West End.

"Aye—Ted Shelbrooke. Fifteen years in the Foreign Office. Couldn't see much inducement in the way of pay or glory for several years—fancied he might do better outside. As a matter of fact, I'm paying him twice as much for special work as the last salary he had from Government. He should be out in the radio-room, now."

Greaves murmured a brief order through one of the desk-telephones, and presently a well-set-up man of about forty-two, with gray eyes and dark-brown hair beginning to turn at the temples, came in. He smiled pleasantly and shook hands with the visitors.

"Hongkong last time, wasn't it, Marquess? And Buenos Aires with Lord Lammerford! Now—I'm a press-johnny! Well—what's all this about? Looks like a powwow."

Greaves, with his newspaper experience, delineated the story even more concisely than had the Marquess—and tossed the dinner-lists across the desk to Shelbrooke, who presently asked:

"What would be your idea, Marquess—as a starting-point?"

"Some little family hotel—fairly clean and well-run. Sort of place where the class of communist an' soviet agents who

occasionally bathe an' wear well-cut clothes would stay, in order to have conferences there with the much higher grade of men and women associated with them but who live in the West End or on suburban estates."

SHEL BROOKE'S expression changed in obvious surprise.

"I say! . . . You've hit it in one, Marquess! But—just what's the connection with these dinner-guests?"

"May not be any at all—unless they come down there with the West End lot. Point's this: They slipped up to-night—just when they were dead sure they'd stopped Bannister from speaking. There will be argum'nt—the disposition to blame somebody. They certainly did not wish that speech made in the Commons—it was a jolt at communism that the people of the United Kingdom will keep in mind for some time. The rank and file will want to know how it happened. Some of the West Enders will go down to that hotel to talk it over. Can you think of what hotel it might be, Shelbrooke? . . . Or, say, which of three or four?"

"Faith, I fancy I can spot it first shot, sir! Of course I'd not suspected anything like the killing, in this untraceable way—but I have managed to overhear bits of plottin' at Fitzgerald's Family Hotel in Camberwell. Fancy if I were to go down there now and take a room for a couple of nights, I might easily pick up something.

"Want company?"

"Might be a bit dangerous, Marquess—for a couple of Your Lordships' type. An' I doubt if we'd get anything—"

Greaves chuckled. "Known 'em for some years, haven't you, Ted? Known 'em pretty well, as you see 'em in houses or about town. But did you ever go slumming with 'em? You wait here a few minutes—give 'em a chance to prink a bit. What?"

Shelbrooke had to look a second time before perceiving anything recognizable about either of the men who came back from that private office a few moments later. Anyone familiar with the types seen along the docks would have described them as the master of a cargo-boat in his best shore clothes, and his mate, in similar rig—bent upon having a night or two away from their boat and seeing life. Their manner and speech were in keeping with their appearance.

Shelbrooke nodded apologetically.

"My mistake, gentlemen! I should have remembered that Lord Lammerford was at one time Dean of the King's Messengers. Er—I was about to suggest that Mr. Greaves send Fletcher down to the Portugal House in Rosemary Road, and Wyatt to McCann's Hotel in Commercial Road, as soon as they can start—keep 'em there two or three nights at least. How does that strike you, Marquess?"

"The idea bein' to cover the three most likely places in Camberwell—where there might be some of these conferences?"

"The three most likely in all London, sir—except of course West End and country-houses, where there never would be more than two of the gang at the same time. I think that Fletcher and Wyatt would agree that any conferences likely to interest us would take place in one of those three little hotels in Camberwell. Italian, Spanish, Maltese an' Greek would be in one of five small places over back of the Tower. Communist and Bolshie thugs and murderers,—that lot,—executives, you might call 'em—"

"In the old loft at Wapping. Aye—we know *that*, intimately! Your suggestion about those other two Camberwell hotels is a jolly good one, Shelbrooke.—And that reminds me, Harley! It won't do at all to take these lists with us. Could you photograph 'em—send the prints at once by one of the syndicate planes, to your assistant managers in Paris and Berlin, with orders to start their best men running down all the information obtainable concerning every name in the lists?"

"Being photographed now, Marquess—that was obviously a first move. I sent 'em up to the camera-room while you were changing."

AS they were crossing Blackfriars Bridge and driving down through Southwark, Shelbrooke said:

"You've possibly noticed it yourselves, gentlemen, but I only discovered the other day, that those smaller hotels in the less respectable parts of the city are almost never more than half full. They seem to make a very good living on that basis, and it keeps activity at the minimum around the buildings—less chance for spies than in a crowded house—better chance for spotting espionage from Secret Service men at once. For that reason, they don't make up more than half the rooms—keeping bedclothes in the linen-lockers, an' mattresses an' pil-

lows under baize covers on the beds until needed. I doubt if we see a single room made up on the second-floor-front, though on the third floor, practically everything is ready for business. Well, as it concerns us, point's this, d'y'e see: Whatever two rooms we're given tonight—single or double—will be directly adjoining those of anyone else who books tonight, because there'll not be more than five or six unoccupied rooms in the house which are made up and available at the moment. Do you catch it?"

"Now that's a bit intriguing, Shelbrooke! Fancy I'd never noticed that little custom in London, before—though one sees it in old Paris. If you're right as to its bein' dependable, we may have a spot of luck."

There were four men and two women in the little bar parlor, smoking and chatting in undertones, when the three reached Fitzgerald's Family Hotel in Camberwell. Two of the men appeared to be transients, and they drifted off to bed while the others continued their discussion. No attention was paid to the new arrivals. Calling for mugs of very palatable ale and cheese sandwiches (some of the smaller hotels in slum districts are licensed until one A. M.) they sat down at a table near the bar window to eat them—then booked a single and a double room on the third floor after the girl had assured them nothing lower was available.

Lammerford had glanced through the window and counted the unoccupied key-hooks on the blackboard, and after they were in their communicating rooms, with the door shut, he muttered:

"If anyone else turns up they can't get anything but the single and double rooms next to this, and they'll doubtless do their talking in the double-room which has a window on the same fire-escape as this. I'll get in through that, an' see if I can hide a dictaphone somewhere—you give three taps on the wall if you hear anyone coming up. My impression is that those four in the bar parlor are waiting for two or three others—having already booked rooms for themselves. You heard that bit of Russian, Shelbrooke? They're unquestionably Muscovites."

A moment later the Earl disappeared without making a sound. In the adjoining room there was a heavy horsehair sofa pushed solidly against their partition-wall. Moving this out a bit with some effort, he found that the horsehair

in front covered the usual wadding resting against spiral springs secured to the rough under-frame of the sofa, and that there were spaces in the wadding between the springs. Ripping a ten-inch slit in the baize backing, he slipped in a powerful dictaphone which he had fetched along in a small suitcase; then he bored a couple of small holes through the four-inch partition with a push-drill—pushed through wires from the dictaphone—and was back in their own room, in not over twelve minutes from the time he had left. As the bar was now closed for the night, they heard the bar-maid coming up the stairs with a party of six or seven whom she put in the adjoining room—four of them having other quarters at the rear end of the hall.

IT was half an hour before the conversation in Russian took a turn really interesting to the listeners. Before that, it had dealt with the propaganda in London and the "politicals" coming under their influence. But presently one of the women asked a man with an Oxford accent what had happened in Parliament the previous evening before the occurrences described in the news-bulletins—how it was that Bannister had been able to speak at all, not to mention speaking in the way he certainly had? Had there been anything in the rumors going about, that he probably would not speak at that time?

The man hesitated before answering. "What actually happened was about like this: Bannister was playing tennis down in Hants during the afternoon. Had his tea there, and then drove into town where he dined with Lord and Lady Gartham, in a party of twelve. About nine, he cuts the dessert and goes to Westminster—where he becomes ill in one of the House committee-rooms. They called in Sir John Frobisher, but the impression is that he'd have been too late had it not been for that old busy-body Lyonesse, who gets boiling water up from the House restaurant and mixes up some concoction, probably, for Bannister to take—which held him until Sir John could use more drastic measures. The man looked pretty sick, but he certainly made the speech of his life—worse luck!"

"What is supposed to have made him sick—something he'd eaten or drunk?"

"Not much doubt of that, I fancy."

"But where did he get it? With his tea—or at the dinner? One understands

that such attacks always come within so many hours after the last or the next-to-the-last meal."

"That's right. He could have got it at either place, I'd say. Came devilish near carrying him off, too!"

A breath of chill night air drew the glances of the listeners to the open window. Lammerford had silently disappeared. A few minutes later he came in, closing the window without a sound—and half an hour later the guests in the little hotel were asleep. . . .

By ten in the forenoon, the three left the place and took a taxi to the Trevor mansion in Park Lane—where they drifted into the big Jacobean library to consider what little they had picked up. Lammerford explained:

"That Oxford bounder's voice seemed vaguely familiar, so I went out on the fire-escape to see if I could get a glimpse of him. He's by way of bein' connected with a bankin'-house which handles a lot of the foreign money coming into London—but not actively. Seen more frequently in the clubs an' more swagger town-houses. One of the women is often seen in society. Both of 'em are of the 'parlor-pink' type—takin' up the socialist or communist idea as a fad—might be Russian, of course, but also might be Irish or Scotch."

"Then—you don't fancy that lot could have been mixed up with any assassination plot—if there is one?"

"Wouldn't say that—they *might*. Fact of their goin' down to that hotel at that time of night for a conference with the others is against them. Fact of their saying nothing incriminating even among themselves is also against them. You'll remember we didn't hear a solitary word that mightn't have been said by perfectly innocent persons—yet some of those questions and answers covered exactly the sort of information they might have been asked to come down and give. The fact that they were able to keep such close mouths indicates a good bit of practice in that line an' a thorough realization that there isn't a shred of evidence against 'em as long as they do keep their mouths shut."

"How about the 'afternoon-tea' possibility?"

"Well—in all four cases the attacks started within about the same time after the man had dined; presumably, whatever they may have been given would take the same time to act, which might make it too late for tea. Then—in the

French and German cases, 'tea' is not a custom over there. Of course it would be much easier to get the stuff into anyone while tea is bein' poured and handed round, because a dinner implies planting the poisoner among the waiters or footmen—not so easy to do at short notice. But among several dinner-guests one of them might do it without incurring the least suspicion—with luck."

FOR a month, a number of the keenest syndicate writers in Europe devoted at least half their time to obtaining personal information concerning both guests and waiters at each of the four dinners—getting the coded data into the hands of Harley Greaves in Red Lion Court and the Marquess, in Park Lane. Then there came an evening when Lyonesse and Lammerford drove down to meet Ted Shelbrooke in Greaves' office. In a few moments, the Marquess began a tentative summing-up:

"What surprised me most in this investigation is that we can't dig up a single person who was present at more than two of those dinners. Tufton, the banker, whom we know to be associating with communist and soviet agents—and who was at the Camberwell hotel that night—was one of the party at the Adlon in Berlin when Paul Schirmer got his, but was not at the other three. He did, however, fly over from London that morning—whatever that fact may be worth. Mrs. White—also down in Camberwell—was visiting friends in Fontainebleau the night René Du Bois dined there, but was not at the dinner and doesn't appear to have known anybody who was. I don't know whether she was in London that morning or not—but it's a simple matter to check that up. Countess Phoebe of Lanniston, the Welverly-Dysarts, and Sir Thomas Boyle were at both the London dinners. Madame Julie Fournier was at one of the London dinners and also at the Fontainebleau one. Sir Gregory Jayne and Lady Jayne were at the Worrall dinner here in London and also at the Adlon in Berlin. Not a single butler, footman, waiter or other employee was at more than one of the dinners."

"Sure of that, Marquess?"

"That's what it boils down to. I particularly had that item checked over and investigated most thoroughly—until I'm satisfied."

"Then—that makes it a certainty that the poisoner in each case must have been one of the dinner-guests?"

"Looks that way to me. And out of the dinner-guests, we've but nine possibles. Tufton an' Mrs. White are fair suspects in the cases of Schirmer and Du Bois because we know they're mixed up with the Bolshies—but there's not a shred of evidence that they even *could* have killed Worrall or Bannister. Of the other seven present at more than one dinner, the more diggin' we do, the more everyone present at the four dinners comes out with records and reputations which put 'em beyond suspicion."

Shelbrooke had been concentrating on the proposition as he sprawled in a big chair, smoking. Presently he asked:

"It would seem to be a waste of time, I suppose—but has either of you three thought of diggin' into a few of the victims' more intimate, everyday acquaintances—people they frequently motor and play games with?"

Harley Greaves filled his pipe—and nodded.

"Aye—an' I'll admit it seemed to me a fool hunch when I started it. But I put Sarah Barnard—our society index, as we call her—to digging out people who might be just possibly acquaintances of all four victims—gettin' a line around behind the proposition, you might say. She found that Von Tannitz of the German Embassy knew all four men pretty well an' frequently saw them. Lady Bentham knew all but Schirmer. The Barclays, of Huddlestone Manor in Berks, knew Schirmer, Worrall and Bannister very well—had 'em down there frequently. Lady Claire, Countess of Wrexley, down in Hants, knew Worrall an' Bannister in a friendly way—had 'em down there often. Believed to have known Du Bois also, though he wasn't seen there."

A gleam came into Shelbrooke's eyes, as he asked:

"Did Sarah dig into Lady Claire's history at all?"

"Oh, aye! Daughter of a younger son who went out to Canada in 1917, when he was fifty and she eighteen—an' made a bit of money there. Lord Wrexley met her in Winnipeg and they made a match of it, though he was her father's age. Fetched her home to his beautiful estate in Hants—then went off an embarkment in his car, drivin' down from London, and was found dead underneath it. No children. Seems she'd been getting some medical training in Winnipeg—always a bit of a student. Last year of the war she nursed in a hospital

where they gave her a chance to take medicine an' chemistry on the side while she was gettin' the field-practice. After the war she settled down on her estate—went in for horticulture, specializin' in orchids and tropical plants—has some wonderful greenhouses down in Hants."

"H-m-m—has she any medical practice?"

"Nothing beyond prescribing occasionally for a friend or neighbor who is ill. I fancy she's more interested at present in the chemical side—does a good bit of experimentin' for the War Office. Exhibits her orchids at all the shows, and a lot of other rare plants besides. Have you any particular int'rest in her, Ted?"

"Aye. Her dabblin' in chemistry and horticulture started it. I knew some chaps in Winnipeg—put through a cable inquiry in a code we used some years ago. They said that when the girl first appeared out there in '17, she called herself 'Claire Oxenham' and said she came from York—but the father who turned up an' joined her was recognized by one of Edgerton's friends as a man who had gone by the name of Stefan Golowski in Montreal, and still had a bit of foreign accent when he came to Winnipeg as 'Stephen Oxenham.' Not much question as to the relationship—the resemblance between them was too strong. He struck it rich out there in a space of one week, prospectin' near Cobalt—then was shot one night. The rest of the story is as Sarah got it. The Countess still owns an' operates the mine—and she inherited a fortune from Wrexley."

"My word! . . . You fancy she may be actually Muscovite, Ted?"

"Well—it was at Wrexley Towers down in Hants that Bannister played tennis and had tea that afternoon."

"Oh—I say!" The Marquess deliberately lighted a long cigar. "Is Sarah Barnard in the building, Harley? Send for her."

When Sarah appeared a few moments later, Greaves directed:

"Sarah, find out where the Countess of Wrexley is—where she will be the rest of the night."

It took but a few moments to ascertain that the Countess was spending the evening with friends but would return to her town-house sometime after twelve—and Sarah asked if she could see her there next morning to get some data on orchids. The Countess' secretary thought it would be safe to chance it—said she would give Her Ladyship a memorandum. Then

Sarah smiled brightly at the four men and took herself off.

Greaves asked:

"Are you really convinced, Marquess? I'm a bit stunned, myself! It does look as though we're on the right track—but suppose there's some perfectly good explanation? What?"

"Great cats! How good would it have to be, Harley? A Bolshevik agent—planted over there in Canada where a middle-aged, petticoat-chasin' Earl gets a glimpse of her every day—finds he can't have her without marriage, and falls for it! Gets killed as soon as they settle down at home. What price she monkeyed with the brakes an' steering-gear of his car? She majors in medicine and chemistry—has money to burn for experimentation and the collection of poisonous Asiatic plants. Gives Bannister his cup of afternoon tea while sitting in the shade of her trees down in Hants, an' slips in the fatal concoction as she pours. Gives small vials of it to persons like Tufton and Mrs. White, who see that some executive gets it into the victim's food at any specified dinner. Yes, I'm convinced; and I fancy the Home Secretary will be also when we three go to him—right now!"

"Great Scott! . . . What do you fancy he'll give you?"

"Some sort of authority for search and arrest—on the evidence already obtained. Then we go down to Hants an' quietly burglarize those greenhouses, the chemical laboratory an' the dispensary. With the woman away all night, I fancy we can do it without noise or interference—but if we're caught, we'll have some sort of a warrant. What I'm really bankin' on is her turning up during the night so we can get her—cold!"

WHEN the Countess returned to her town-house at twelve-thirty, accompanied by Tufton, the memorandum of Sarah Barnard's appointment for the following morning didn't strike her as anything unusual—but after she had been in bed some time, she thought: "That girl's a newspaper-woman—her editors know now that I'll be in town all night. Suppose they're sending somebody down to Wrexley Towers?" She was out of bed in a flash—quickly dressing, and telephoning her chauffeur for the car at once.

When she reached the Hants estate there was no light or sound about the place. Letting herself in by a small side door, she silently explored the ground

floor—then went down the narrow hall to a small disused wing in which concrete rooms had been built to house her chemical laboratory and dispensary, with their wonderfully up-to-date equipment. She stepped into the laboratory, closing the door behind her, then snapped on the lights. There was no evidence at first glance that anything had been disturbed. But—a powerful arm, on either side, reached over her shoulder and grasped a wrist. The sharp little splinter of glass between the fingers of her left hand dropped to the floor from the pressure on the wrist, and the automatic in the other hand was wrenched loose. Handcuffs and marine secured her arms behind her back—and her ankles were bound. Then a big woman came in as the men went out and stripped the Countess to her skin—afterward going through her bobbed hair with a fine-toothed comb, and forcing open her mouth and inspecting the fillings of her teeth. After the woman had fetched underclothes and a negligée, the men returned. The Countess' face was for a moment that of a fiend—then it became strikingly handsome as she quietly asked:

"Are you brutes quite sure that you have taken sufficient precautions against my doing anything serious? And have you any authority for this?"

The Marquess looked at her somberly. "Plenty of authority—and we hope we've cut all your claws, Countess! One tiny scratch from that splinter of glass you had when you came in would have killed any man who got it—and he'd have suffered frightfully. *Curare* isn't nice, you know. You were a pretty dangerous proposition in the dark! As for our authority—well—we're taking along to the analyst of the Home Office some plants from your greenhouses—bottles from your lab' and dispensary. Fancy he'll find them quite sufficient. As for our havin' you searched to your skin—well, we did find those capsules in your hair, d'ye see—and we prefer not to have any stalemate about this affair. Your passing out with a dose of cyanide wouldn't suit us at all—it's to be hoped that may be prevented. You see, Countess, you have fiendishly, cold-bloodedly, murdered three valuable men whom we couldn't spare. And you handed your 'friend,' Bannister, what you knew and intended to be his death in a cup of tea. Trusting you, as one does trust his friends, he swallowed it. Now—law and justice demand that you shall hang!"

Breeches Burned Behind

Bugwine Breck the human bloodhound undertakes a dangerous case that involves minor arson and major calamity.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry



WITH a foot-shaped pain in the seat of his faded blue overalls, Bugwine Breck broke into a gallop down the dusty alley. On a porch behind Bugwine the muscle-bound "Big Ugly" Snaws nursed the foot that had just separated his receding son-in-law from free bed and board.

"—And don't you come back no mo' twel you is done hook up wid a job!" climaxed Mr. Snaws. "I marries my gal Geranium off—not you on!"

The bench-legged Mr. Breck didn't hang around listening. Still vivid in his memory was Big Ugly's last display of peevishness, in which its object, Willie Freeman the pants-pressing boy, had been crippled for a week. Mr. Snaws in a tantrum was no man to mess with! So if he grew narrow-minded about his daughter's husband's diet, there was nothing for a boy to do but catch air—or get a job.

Under the urge of the latter thought, Bugwine's mind and feet again turned toward the private detective agency of the dusky Columbus Collins; maybe Mr. Collins had forgotten his record as a sleuth by now. And in a country with ten millions of unemployed, even so slender a chance as that was worth taking in the interests of future food.

"Bloodhound blood, git stirring!" Mr. Breck forthwith addressed his circulatory system, and took it.

Seated listlessly on the front stoop of his agency, the gangling and sour-visaged Columbus saw him coming but made no move.

"Knowed it ever since dat black cat

cross de road in front of me dis mawn-in'!" he grumbled resignedly at Mr. Breck's advent.

"Knowed whut?"

"Dat you was liable be comin' back after yo' old job again."

Bugwine eyed his two left shoes. If black cats were getting mixed up in his business this early, old future was getting no better powerful fast.

"How de detectin' business comin' along?" he sounded out his prospects preliminarily.

Columbus scowled.

"Wuss—now dat's you is tryin' to git back in it! Bad enough before dat; last time I eats was Tuesday."

Mr. Breck swallowed—just to keep in practice. This was Thursday.

"Keep on messin' round here," Columbus surrendered further to the shadow cast over him by the cat, "and I makes you a partner—den you is git hongry."

But Bugwine saw light where Columbus saw darkness: If it took the possession of a job to get up to Big Ugly's table, think of his standing around the family larder if he came back as a big business-man—a partner!

"DONE took you up!" he instantly turned a threat into an offer, and accepted it. "Tonsils, stand back! Vitals comin' down!"

"Somep'n else you got to lay off of first," demurred Mr. Collins reminiscently.

"Whut dat?"

"Bein' dumb in de head—makin' a mess out of eve'ything you touches."

"Bugwine Breck always gits his man," chanted the re-hired Mr. Breck chestily. "Yeah! By fallin' over him while you is lookin' for somebody else, may-be!"

With a tattered sleeve Bugwine dusted off his all-weather straw hat with the hoof-hole in its flapping crown, and tried to look reformed.



"Craves to consult wid you, quick!" gasped the arriving Willie.

Startling developments across the alley interrupted him. From a paintless one-story frame shack there, the dingy windows of which bore the crude legend

WILLIE FREEMAN
sUrTs PRessT wHrLE YoU wArTs

burst now none other than its proprietor. Willie shot out of his shop like the R. F. C. Board turning out to answer a ten-blow alarm in a railroad treasurer's office; the protrusion of his eyes and the speed of his sprinting indicated that something serious was not only brewing but had already brewed.

"Ugh-oh!" foreboded Bugwine as Mr. Freeman headed frantically for the agency door.

"Craves to consult wid you, quick!" gasped the arriving Willie a second later. An odor of scorching from across the way began to catch up with him.

"Criminal wid eve'y case," quoted Mr. Collins hungrily. "State yo' business brief; Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, am back on de job and champin' at de bit."

"Fixin' to aint *be* no business!" wailed Mr. Freeman.

"Start at de beginnin' and work nawth," prompted Columbus hollowly. "Us late to lunch."

"Two days late," echoed the assistant sleuth.

"Samson G. Bates am de beginnin'," caterwauled the knob-eyed Willie. "He done come to my shop to git he breeches pressed while he waits, like de sign say—"

Bugwine elbowed his chief aside. If Samson was in it, there was cash money in it; and Columbus would take the case personally if not blocked. For Samson G. Bates was Baptist Hill's biggest business-man—big in body and in range of shady business interests: everything from usury to insurance, that was Samson!

"Sho is a mess of class to yo' trade, Mist' Freeman!" Mr. Breck paid tribute.

Willie swelled, then wilted. "Dat jest make it worse!" he moaned.

"Make whut worse?" Columbus thrust Bugwine aside in turn.

"De holes in Samson's pants!"

Mr. Breck's face betrayed a total intellectual loss, without insurance.

"I sets de hot iron down on Samson's pants while I goes to 'tend to another customer," elucidated Willie. "When I gits back, old iron done burnt a big hole plumb through both de legs of dem breeches. And old Samson settin' in de back room dar waitin' for 'em now."

Bugwine gasped; he knew lese majesty when he heard about it.

"Boy, you aint need no detectives—you needs a motorcycle," diagnosed Columbus disappointedly. "Done burnt yo'self right smack into a jam."

"Needs detectives worse'n ever," Willie revealed the real object of his visit, "to git me *out* of de jam."

COLUMBUS started; a new field of detecting opened before him on the instant. Spurred by revelation, his gaze lifted to where the agency's earliest motto, "A Criminal with Every Case," hung framed upon the wall. Bugwine's gaze dropped apprehensively and simultaneously. When a crook was needed to complete a case, Columbus frequently framed more than mottoes—a junior partner, to be precise!

"Shet up!" barked his chief exasperatedly.

"Aint say nothin'."

"You thunk it!"

Then, "Us takes de case, den, Mist' Freeman—for two bucks, C. O. D. Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, done start bayin' on de trail a'ready. Cain't hear yo'self think!"

"Whut trail?" Bugwine continued mentally in arrears.

His superior whirled on him. "Jest told you!" he snapped. "Trail leadin' Samson *away* from Willie. Your job is to dig up a couple of sour clues whut'll make it look like it wasn't Willie whut arsoned dem breeches."

"Den who w—" Bugwine cut himself off just in time.

But something else had already crossed Columbus' master mind. "Bet you aint even got no fire-insurance, is you, Willie?" he introduced a fresh element into a crowded situation.

Willie gulped at recollection of a new angle. "Yeah, I is," he admitted hesitantly. "I done took it out last week, but—"

"Took it from who?"

"Samson G. Bates, de—"

"Git a rag, Bugwine!" interrupted a further-galvanized Columbus. "Rub off de client's shoes! Old trail gittin' hot! Us fixin' to show service. Fix eve'ything! I done scum a scheme. Super-service, dat's us all over now!"

Bugwine blinked. "Boy aint need no shoe-shine to go to de jail-house wid," he objected thickly.

"Dat's jest it! Willie aint gwine to jail *now*! I jest scum up a scheme to keep Willie out of jails and hospitals."

"Whut de 'super-service' mean?" Bugwine grew no brighter.

"Means git Willie out of de jam by puttin' somebody else in it in his place, dat whut. All Willie got to do is name somebody he sore at, and us hangs it on *dem*. You plants de clues on 'em."

Bugwine's dull eyes betrayed symptoms with which Columbus was unfavorably familiar. "Take dem brains of yourn out and give 'em air, boy!" he directed sharply. "Fixin' to choke dey-selves to death on a idea in a minute. And *stay* out twel I sets Willie, here, straight: he done come to de right place, and his business aint even in a jam no mo' now."

"Huccome it aint?" demanded Mr. Freeman incredulously, as Bugwine departed. "Aint old Samson settin' in my place now, whar aint nobody but me works, in old frog-tail coat and shorts, bellerin' like a fog-haw'n for dem burnt-up breeches?"



"I has to let Bugwine out, to keep from sprainin' his mind tryin' to think wid it befo' it gits wawmed up good," explained Columbus. "He aint know all I knows—yit. Old case jest now split into two parts, service and super-service. Service collects for de breeches, and super-service saddles de holes in 'em on somebody else whut you craves to git even wid."

"Collects for de breeches?" Willie's bewilderment joined Bugwine's.

"Sure. I separates de two Samsons too—"

Mr. Freeman's mind sagged perceptibly at fresh overloads. "Two Samsons?" he quoted groggily.

"Right! Samson de boy whut's gittin' his breeches pressed, and Samson de fire-insurance agent. You's fixin' to do business wid both of 'em."

Willie's jaw waggled and a glazed look came into eyes that were signaling for help.

"I means," elaborated the sleuth, "dat

de fire in Samson's pants is covered by de fire-insurance policy Samson de insurance boy sell you, aint it? So all you got do is jest step over and bust de news to dat big fog-hawn in shorts dat he's fixin' to pay hisself off for dem pants. Two dollars, please."

"Pay hisself off?" Willie continued to muff everything.

"Out of de policy! And aint nobody sore but de insurance company whut aint own de breeches twel dey gits on fire."

Mr. Freeman's face became more than a study: it was practically a curriculum. He surveyed his five-feet-two of sedentary skinniness dubiously. "Seems like," he struggled, "dat I aint—"

"Git on back and read yo' policy, *quick!*" directed Columbus tartly. "Dat settle more dan all dat head-scratchin' you is doin'."

Willie gestured hopelessly, helplessly. "Dat whut pesterin' me," he confessed. "I can't read—and I can't 'xactly remember— *Ugh-oh!* Dar he go, bellerin' for he breeches out dat back winder again!"

"Remember whut? Fotch me de policy, den—I'll read it!" shouted Columbus after the retreating client. "—And eat!"

At reference to eating, the dazed Bugwine grew instantly visible in the agency door again.

"Grab up de bear-trap and mazdafyin'-glass, boy!" Mr. Collins greeted him. "You got a whole mess of detectin' to do, handlin' dat super-service now for Willie."

"All broke out wid baggage now," protested Mr. Breck resentfully. "And aims to add on dat lantern hangin' dar, too. Might need it to look round in de dark for clues wid."

"Was yo' head as full of brains as dat lantern full of oil, you might git some-whars, instead of all time gummin' up eve'ything you touches," grunted Columbus as Bugwine lifted the lantern from its nail and shook it inquiringly.

"Whut you means, *super-service?*" Mr. Breck re-stated a question grown chronic with him.

"Means client clear hisself by namin' his own crook."

"Name who?"

"Leaves dat to Willie—and you. Here he come back wid de policy now."

MR. FREEMAN entered at a gallop. "Old Samson sho gittin' hard to pacify!" He wiped the sweat from a fur-

rowed forehead. "Say he got to git out to a meetin' at de bank."

"Dat make him pay off dat much quicker," *Pollyanna'd* Mr. Collins. "Slip me de policy."

"Why aint you lend Samson somebody else's breeches—tame him down while us is spellin' out de policy and cookin' up de clues?" interjected the mental lightweight of the agency.

"Aint nothin' in dar big enough for him—except'n a barrel. Make haste and read de policy, Columbus. Business still in a jam."

COLUMBUS unfolded a document resembling the Treaty of Versailles in appearance and number of legal loopholes.

From across the alley, meanwhile, there rang renewed roarings.

"Sounds like de time Big Ugly Snews got after me," reminisced Mr. Freeman nervously. "I had to lock Samson in, he was gittin' so vigorous. Left de key stickin' in de outside de door for long 'nough for us to read de policy."

"Reminds me, I is got to git word to Big Ugly I's *workin'* again," recalled Mr. Breck, "so's I can go home for dinner."

"Shet up! I's four '*whereas'es*' and one '*party of de second part*' behind now," rebuked Mr. Collins sternly.

"Whut de policy say about de pants?" Mr. Freeman was all but pawing at Columbus' knee in his anxiety.

"Says— *Ugh-oh!*" The light of inspiration in Mr. Collins' eyes suddenly blinked and went out.

"Might have knowed if Samson sell it, dey's a trick in it," Bugwine read this eclipse shrewdly. "Dat big boy aint never give nobody a break but hisself."

"Done give hisself a whole mess of breaks *dis* time," Columbus looked like a man watching two dollars disappear into thin air.

Mr. Freeman's dusky pallor deepened; so did the bayings of Mr. Bates across the way.

"Huccome 'breaks'?" Willie pressed the question.

"Policy here say," croaked the crushed Mr. Collins, "dat de pay-off aint due and start twel dey is *more* dan fifty dollars' damage done. Den it becomes ret—retroactive. Old breeches aint liable be wuth fifty dollars—"

"Whut dat 'ret-ro-active' mean?" Bugwine distrusted big words.



"Old Samson," gasped Mr. Collins, "aint even started runnin' yit!" For the barrel also was on fire.

"Lose fifty bucks," wept the freshly sunk Willie, "and it aint make no difference whut it means! Knewed all time dey was somep'n I couldn't ricollect about dat policy! Now I's right back whar I started from, which is in de soup. And a heap of help you two boys is! Takes de case away from you beca'ze dey *aint* no case. Jest be me and Samson, from now on!"

Bugwine couldn't hear for watching his place at Big Ugly's table recede. But suddenly, magnificently, Mr. Collins' mind again rose to the occasion. Watching it, Mr. Breck shuddered even while hope revived: so often when Mr. Collins rose to an occasion he stood upon the prostrate form of Mr. Breck to do it!

"I aint through yit!" this new Columbus transfixed and held an enfeebled Willie, an uneasy Bugwine. "Old super-service jest *startin'* to rally round now!"

"Yeah? Old fire-loss too little for de policy and too big for me. Needs super-service now like a snake needs socks," croaked Mr. Freeman skeptically.

"Maybe. But how about de hospital part, is you take de case away from us now?"

"Whut hospital?"

"One Samson gits you ready for, for burnin' up his breeches."

Mr. Freeman blanched to a light coal-color. He had overlooked one of the rougher details of his original predicament. Nobody but the agency stood between him and Samson *now*.

"Of course," Columbus turned on the salesmanship harder as he wavered, "is you rather handle de case yo'self, and let Samson use yo' face for a rug—"

"Leaves de case wid you," yelled Willie abjectly. "But craves action. 'Splanify de super-service."

"Means aint no way to collect insurance on de pants, but still a way to keep yo' skin in one piece. By makin' it look like somebody else whut you aint like done burnt 'em. Bugwine, here, cooks up de clues: he can git *anything* wrong wid one lobe of he brains tied behind him."

"Yeah, but who did burn dem breeches?" Willie started feeling innocent immediately.

"Anybody you say—anybody dat you is mad at and craves to git even wid easy."

Mr. Freeman's feet and memory stirred. Hope dawned. And he still had a few remindful bruises left, he discovered. Old embers of animosities began to glow accordingly. "I aint mad at nobody," he debated under their in-

fluence, "exceptin' one man; and he sho is treat me rough. Done dust off de whole street wid me last week. He's—"

"Take note de name, Bugwine, so you can rally de clues," instructed Columbus.

"—Big Ugly Snews!" concluded Willie vindictively.

Mr. Breck's involuntary yelp first told of his own fatal connection with the case by marriage. Frame his own father-in-law—the provider whose food and favor he was even then striving to regain? The room rang with the conflict between his personal and professional interests.

"Work fast wid de case, too," Columbus interrupted his sufferings harshly, "before I busts you one! I needs de two dollars. And Samson liable bust out any minute now; den aint *be* no case—jest be de blur whar Willie *was*."

"Crawls under de old freight-depot twel de hurricane blow over about dem pants," Mr. Freeman left his forward-ing address at this thought.

MR. COLLINS gathered himself anew in the interest of his fee; he laid Mr. Freeman's weasel-worded policy upon the table, and his gaze fell blisteringly upon his stunted aide. At the moment, Mr. Breck was showing a lot of white in both eyes, and giving the impression of being low enough spiritually to do pole-vaulting under a worm.

"Step on yo'self, boy!" barked his chief. "Rally wid dem wrong clues. S'pose Samson burst out while you's gap-in'; den whar is you?"

"Jest passin' Memphis," predicted Mr. Breck feebly.

"I'll do all de passin'—at your jaw, is you aint git busy!" menaced his superior savagely. "Grab holt dat lantern now, and *detect!* And don't come back here twel you is hung dat pants-arson on Big Ugly Snews like de client specify and de super-service promise! Been lay-in' for you ever since you cuts me out wid Geranium, nohow."

Followed clank of bear-trap and clatter of T-square, yardstick, and lantern as Bugwine prepared mournfully to enter upon what was bearing an increasing resemblance to his Last Case.

"You sounds like a shipment of hardware," commented Columbus caustically. "And whut you lightin' de lantern in de daytime for?"

"Hit's dark under de pressin'-shop. Needs all de light I can git lookin' for clues whar dey aint none," responded Mr. Breck gloomily. "I looks under dar

for de wrong footsteps, to measure like old detectin'-book say. Den tracks 'em to dey lair. 'Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his man.'"

"Sounds all right, listenin' to you," admitted his superior sourly, "but you always is gum up eve'ything befo' you quits. And look out Samson aint see you."

"Aint nobody gwine see me—be under de floor in de dark. Den be under de daisies, after Big Ugly git done wid me for fram'in' him."

"Twel I gits two dollars, and eats," Mr. Collins dismissed trifles, "I aint studyin' about yo' family troubles."

From across the alley arose renewed shouts and batterings, as of a strong man in shorts, aroused. Urgency rose miasma-like, in the air.

"You hears dat, aint you?" queried Columbus significantly. "Somebody liable see dat key stickin' in de outside Willie's door any minute now and let him loose on Willie, too. Mess up eve'ything, specially Willie and my two dollars."

"Detours 'n' comes up under de pressin'-shop from de back," outlined Bugwine as, Diogenes-like, he set forth with his lantern.

With eyes glued to the space beneath the agency's drawn window-shade, Columbus watched and waited, empty-stomached. The muffled bayings of Mr. Bates for his trousers rose to new heights, but the alley was empty, slumbering in the winter sun.

"'Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his man,' eh?" quoted Mr. Collins uneasily. "Only trouble is, it's always de wrong man!"

Like so many of his race, however, Columbus could not stand suspense: subjected to it, he invariably fell asleep—slumbers during which things could change radically. . . . As now.

WITH a start Mr. Collins awoke. The alley, deserted when he drowsed off, was now alive with excited compatriots. In his ears were strange sounds, too—sounds of the crackle of flames, the oncoming wail and clangor of siren and gong on fire-engines.

Across the way, smoke and flame now enveloped the tinder-dry frame pressing-shop of the absent Willie Freeman. While, from beneath the structure, like a scorched rabbit from a blazing brush-heap, suddenly shot—Bugwine Breck, minus his lantern.

Columbus saw the last—and saw all. The blundering Bugwine had set the shop on fire! Then Mr. Collins' mind hurdled, horrified, from Cause to Effect; still unknown to the general public, Samson G. Bates was locked in the burning building, without any pants!

Pausing only to seize the agency's air-



Mr. Breck emerged apprehensively, in an aura of dust and cobwebs, with Willie Freeman crawling uncertainly in his rear.

rifle, for later use on his assistant, Columbus leaped for the door. If his two dollars was hopeless now for aiding Willie, he might get as much for releasing Samson! And he could shoot Bugwine later and better on a full stomach after that—Bugwine, who had gummed up a good case by crawling beneath a frame shack with a lighted lantern to look for nonexistent footprints, and set the structure on fire instead!

But Columbus was barely in time. Scarcely had he crossed the alley and turned the key still sticking in the outside of Willie's lock there, when in his ears came a screeching that deafened him, and clamorously through the door before him shot a scorched and portly personage in a "frock-tail" coat and haste; close-clutched about his speeding middle was Willie's barrel!

"Ugh-oh!" gasped the startled Mr. Collins as he caught a rear view of Mr. Bates' future. "Old Samson aint even started to runnin', yit!"

For the barrel was also on fire.

Columbus reeled anew before vistas and possibilities that the latter feature opened before him. Here was a situation fraught with meaning—not only for Mr. Bates but for the Collins detective agency. For arson was about to merge into mayhem, with the blundering Bugwine again at the bottom of it all. For which reason Bugwine must be disowned by the agency before his mishap could involve Columbus with Samson, past mending.

Disgust swept Mr. Collins as he pondered it—disgust with Bugwine, the dumb—Bugwine, who ever gummed the works. Right when the agency was on the verge of eating again *via* a two-dollar fee, too—two dollars that Mr. Breck's latest exploit had but rendered the more remote.

Yet, as Columbus wrestled with his predicament, light appeared: the situation contained the seeds of its own vengeance. All he had to do was to turn

Bugwine over to Samson, thus forcing him to face the music of his own bungling making; and no blood shed on the agency's premises. Let Samson shoot Bugwine, instead!

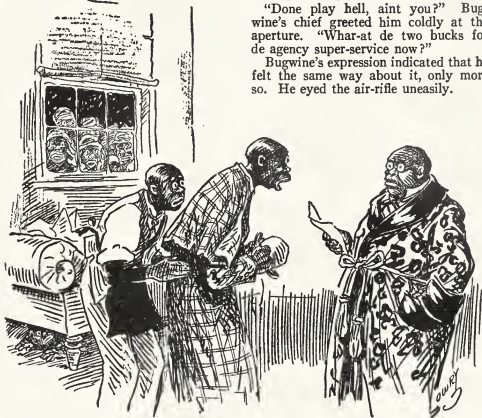
In a one-sanctuary town like Demopolis, finding any dusky refugee was

a boy, he came—or learned shortly the magnitude of his error in refusing.

Therefore, Mr. Breck emerged apprehensively, in an aura of dust and cobwebs, with Willie Freeman crawling uncertainly in his rear. Willie's status was getting harder to figure than the Fourth Dimension.

"Done play hell, aint you?" Bugwine's chief greeted him coldly at the aperture. "Whar-at de two bucks for de agency super-service now?"

Bugwine's expression indicated that he felt the same way about it, only more so. He eyed the air-rifle uneasily.



"Set down!" Mr. Bates broke a silence disturbed only by the breathing of Bugwine Breck in his refuge beneath the sofa.

easy. By now, Columbus knew, Mr. Breck—like Willie—would be far back under the old freight-house, waiting wall-eyed for times to get better.

Following which hunch, with half the unemployed population of Hogan's and Kaufman's Alleys crowding delightedly at his heels, the armed Columbus shuffled grimly toward that structure.

ARRIVING before it, he gave tongue outside the only opening in the wooden lattice that enclosed its base:

"Samson G. Bates done sent for you, Bugwine!"

Mumblings and scramblings in the inner darkness indicated that the shout had told, that the magic of Samson's name was working fearfully and normally there. For when Samson sent for

"Willie burnt up de breeches—den you burnt up de shop," summarized Mr. Collins acidly, "is how-come I fires you, den turns you over to Samson."

Willie thought of something amid difficulties.

"Whar-at do Big Ugly Snews come in?" he questioned.

"Aint come in. Bugwine done took his place. Dat lets you off—and Bugwine in."

"Was lookin' for de footprints—" essayed Mr. Breck in a mumble.

"Yeah! —And 'stead of findin' some, you tears loose and makes some—after you dawggone near burn up Samson G. Bates!" hissed Columbus. "Boy, jest wait twel old Samson lay hands on you now! Aint be nothin' left of you but de squeak."

Mr. Breck's gurglings indicated that he was peering into the Pit.

"You goes in front, Bugwine," Columbus marshaled his column. "Willie in de back, whar-at he can see whut happen to you."

"Sho gits super-service," admired Willie empty. "Jest aint got no two dollars now to pay for it wid, since de shop burn up."

"Bugwine pay de two bucks—in hair and hide," rumbled Columbus significantly. "Fawward, march!"

AND thūs came a strange procession upon the thoroughfares of Baptist Hill, under armed escort by Columbus and heading reluctantly toward the combination barber-shop and speak-easy, in a rear room of which Samson G. Bates spun his devious webs.

"Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound!" quoted Columbus scathingly as the motley group rounded the final corner into Hogan's Alley. "Always gits his man, is he? Well, shawt-dawg, dis one time when yo' business gits turned around and yo' man fixin' to git *you*, wid me he'pin' him!"

At Samson's door, Columbus halted his forces, now grown to B. E. F. proportions. All eyes were focused on the unfortunate Bugwine who had set out to divert suspicion from a boy who had burnt two holes in a pair of pants—and instead succeeded in himself burning up the whole building.

Opening of the door revealed Samson G. Bates in person, but in novel and unfamiliar business attire. Instead of the long-tailed coat and peg-top pants in which Mr. Bates normally attended to his usury, insurance, and other interests, he now wore a flowered dressing-gown on his body and a pained expression on his face—while instead of being seated at his accustomed table, he stood before a mantel well-littered with papers, his back to the door.

Samson wheeled swiftly at his visitors' entrance. He took a swift stride toward them—and Bugwine was under the nearest piece of furniture before he could think or Samson could speak. It happened to be a sofa, and a tight fit. Willie Freeman froze where he was, leaving Columbus to face the music first.

Still wordless, Samson limped around them. "Aint nothin' like insurin' privacy durin' a—er—settlement," he chilled three spines with one sentence as he locked the door behind them.

Columbus gulped and, too late, saw the holes in his strategy.

"Set down," Mr. Bates broke a silence disturbed only by the steam-pump breathing of Bugwine Breck beneath his sofa. Samson made a move to accept his own invitation—only to leap aloft like the young hind in springtime, with a sharp howl of anguish.

"Had a little fire in de back," he recalled the barrel. "Dat was whut I been wantin' to git hold of Willie about—"

The yelp under the sofa originated with Mr. Breck, but was credited to Mr. Freeman.

"S-s-sho is," stuttered Mr. Collins vaguely. Dry-mouthed now, and moist-browed, he was recalling his most recent error: he should have sent—not brought—Bugwine to this slaughter. Innocent bystanders had been shot before—

"And I got eve'ything all set, too," continued Mr. Bates enigmatically. "Fixin' to give super-service in a bad piece of business."

Columbus winced; super-service was the name of something quite different that he too had promised—to Willie Freeman. Old business was getting all gummed up again!

"Burnin' up dat pressin'-place—and my pants," persisted Samson inexorably, "made me miss a impawtant meetin', but aint alter de provisions none in de policy I issues—"

"I aint *git* no provisions, even!" rang muffled from beneath the sofa a discharged and discredited Bugwine's farewell to Big Ugly's groaning board.

"So, if Willie Freeman," Samson plowed grimly ahead, "will quit tryin' to climb dat wall, and sign dis here receipt—"

"Receipt?" A dazed Columbus grew dumfounded, then dazzled. Bugwine had blundered again—but into what?

THEN suddenly everything was fixed—including two dollars from Willie, and Bugwine's respective restorations as detective and diner—by Samson's final answer to Columbus' labored question: "Is you mean dat Willie's policy gwine pay off for de pants, too?"

"For eve'ything," a still-unsuspecting Samson's confirmatory booming revealed at last the full extent of the territory that had been taken in by the unwitting Bugwine and his lantern. "—De fifty dollars' exemption bein' rendered null, void, an de policy retroactive when, some way, de *whole shop* git burnt up too!"

When Worlds

The climax of this much-discussed story of two stranger planets that spin out of space—one to smash this earth utterly, the other to offer hope of refuge to the daring crew of a Space Ship.

The Story Thus Far:

TWO stranger stars hurtling out of space toward collision with this world! The astronomer Bronson in his South African observatory discovered them first. And when he had made repeated photographs, he entrusted the plates to a special messenger, the air-mail pilot David Ransdell, who flew with them across Africa to make connections with a steamer for New York.

There Ransdell delivered the precious plates to Cole Hendron, the world's greatest physicist. And thus was born the League of the Last Days; for Hendron confirmed Bronson's observations and calculations; but in order to prevent world-wide panic and hysteria he at first gave out the news only to a selected group of scientists, men best qualified to plan what—if anything—could be done to meet what seemed inevitable doom.

To one man who was not a scientist Hendron confided the facts: to that handsome and athletic young broker Tony Drake, who was deeply in love with Hendron's lovely daughter Eve.

The two stranger stars would pass the earth in their first swing about their new orbits, and would cause gigantic tides and terrific earthquakes. On their second transit, eight months later, Bronson Beta would strike and destroy the earth, even though its sister-planet Bronson Alpha would pass harmless.

The various governments took such steps as they could to move their people away from tidal and volcanic perils. Meanwhile, Hendron started the building of his projected Space Ship at a work-camp in Michigan; and Tony was made a personnel officer to recruit the best brains of the country to join the League of the Last Days and help in their desperate project of building a rocket-driven airship to reach possible safety on Bronson Alpha. . . .

Now Bronson Alpha and its sister

stranger from space became visible to the naked eye. And terrific tides began to drive out the people of the coastal cities. There were of course all manner of riots and public disturbances. Tony's mother was murdered by a gang of marauders. But after her funeral there was no time to grieve, for along with Eve Hendron he had to flee for his life in an airplane to the relatively safe work-camp in northern Michigan. Even there the first passing of the Bronson Bodies brought continual earthquakes, a constant hurricane, a deluge of volcanic mud. Bruised and beaten, barely alive, the survivors learned that the moon had been destroyed while they lay flattened to earth by the dark tempest.

After the immediate first danger was



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Collide

By EDWIN BALMER
and PHILIP WYLIE



Illustrated by
Joseph Franké

over, work on the Space Ship was resumed. Hendron had the necessary power—had learned how to release and use the tremendous force of atomic energy. But he lacked a material that would stand the terrific heat thus engendered.

It was decided to send out an airplane, piloted by Ransdell, to see how the rest of the world had fared. . . . The ship returned after thirty days, with a dreadful report of enormous destruction and unparalleled slaughter; of cities smashed and deserted; of a few communities of desperate survivors. But the plane also brought back something infinitely precious; a hitherto unknown metal that had been thrust up from the earth's core by volcanic action—a metal capable of withstanding the extreme heat generated by the atomic blast. The Space Ship had a chance of success!

But even as they labored frantically to complete this Ark of the Air, a new disaster threatened: an army of desperate men who had survived elsewhere, attacked the camp.

A savage battle ensued; and the vastly outnumbered defenders were forced at last to take refuge in the Space Ship.

And then they made use of a new and terrible weapon—the dreadful atomic blast of the great rocket-ship itself. Hendron turned on his giant rocket-motors; the ship rose a few hundred feet and proved its power to rise. More, it utterly destroyed the host that had massed to overcome them. But the battle had not been without serious losses—among them Bronson himself, the discoverer of the planets now swinging back, one to destroy the world, the other to offer refuge—if the Space Ship proved a success.

While the light of the two strangers grew brighter in the heavens, work was rushed on a second and larger Space Ship. The two, it was calculated, would suffice to carry all remaining of the League of the Last Days on their stupendous voyage. . . . And now the Day—the Day of Departure and Destruction—was at hand. (*The story continues in detail:*)

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST NIGHT ON EARTH

TONY sought out Eve.

"Come walk with me," he said.

"I'd like to. It's so strange to wait, with everything done that matters. For it's all done. Tony; everything that we're



"Papa," it appeared, had brought them there in the dark—and then gone away. Papa had told them to stay there and somebody would come.

to take with us has been prepared and put in place. Except the animals and ourselves."

"Dull lot of animals, mostly," complained Tony. He was excited and on edge, with nerves which he tried to quiet and could not.

HE did not want to talk to Eve tonight about animals; but he might as well, for people were all about, alone or in pairs, likewise restless and excited. "It would be madness to try to bring the interesting animals along, wouldn't it?" Eve said agreeably. "Like lions and tigers and leopards."

"I know," admitted Tony. "Meat-eaters. We can't cart along meat for them, of course; and we can't expect meat on Bronson Alpha. All we can hope for is grass and moss; so we load up with a cow, and a young bull, of course; a pair of sheep of proved breeding ability, a couple of reindeer, and a colt and a young mare. Half humanity lived on horsemeat once and milked the mares.

We'll be allowed goats, too. And deer, if our big ship gets over. Do you suppose there'll be other ships starting from this side of the world tomorrow night and from the other side, the evening after?"

"Father doesn't know. When the radios were working well, months ago, he broadcast the knowledge of David's metal. It must have become obtainable from volcanic eruptions in other places. But we've no real news of anyone else ready to start. One thing is certain. No party can count upon the arrival of any other. Each crew has to assume that it may be the only one that gets across to Bronson Alpha."

"And damn' lucky if it lands, too," agreed Tony. "However, I hope the Australians are making a try, and will start with a kangaroo. And if the South Africans have a ship, they ought to show some originality in animals, even if they too feel confined to grass- and moss-eaters. Who has a chance of sending up a ship, anyway?"

"The English, Father thinks, surely have preserved enough organization to build and equip one ship, and the French, the Germans and Italians ought to do the same. Then there are the Russians and the Japanese at least with the potential ability to do it. There's a chance in Australia and another in South Africa—Lord Rhondin would head any party there, Father thinks."

"Anyone else?"

"A possibility in Argentine and also in China."

"That makes twelve, counting our two."

"Possibilities, that's all. Of course, we know nothing about them. Father guesses that if twelve are trying, perhaps five may get ships out into space."

"What five?" demanded Tony.

"He did not name them."

"Five into space beyond the attraction of the world."

"The world won't be left then, Tony," Eve reminded him.

"Right. Funny how one keeps forgetting that, isn't it? So there'll be no place for them to drop back to, if they miss Bronson Alpha. They just stay—out there in space—in their rocket, with their air-purifiers and oxygen-machines and their compressed food and their seeds and insects and birds or birds' eggs, and carefully chosen grass-eating animals. . . . I imagine they'll eat the animals, at last, out there in space; and then—"

Eve stopped him.

"Why deny the possibilities?" he objected.

"Why dwell on those particular ones, Tony, when they may be the ones we ourselves will meet? We—or our friends in our other ship. . . . It's funny how you men complain about missing the wild animals. Do you know, Tony, that Dave told me that Dr. Bronson thought about the impossibility of taking over lions when he first began planning with Father the idea of the space ships? That night Lord Rhondin and Professor Bronson sent for Dave to bring the plates to Father in New York, Professor Bronson walked about the room and spoke about how there would be no more lions."

"Funny to think of meeting Rhondin for the first time on Bronson Alpha," said Tony, "if we and the South African ship get over. Good egg, Lord Rhondin, from all I hear from Dave."

THEY were off by themselves now, and Tony drew her nearer to him. She neither encouraged nor resisted him. He tightened his arm about her, and felt her softness and warmth against him. For a moment more she remained motionless, neutral; then suddenly her hands were on his arms, clasping him, clinging to him. Her body became tense, thrilling, and as he bent, her lips burned on his.

She drew back a little, and at last he let her. In silence he kissed her again; then her lips, close to his, said: "Farewell to earth, Tony!"

"Yes," he said, quivering. "Yes; I suppose this is our last sure night."

"No; we leave tonight, Tony."

"Tonight? I thought it was tomorrow."

"No; Father feared the last night—if anyone knew it in advance. So he said tomorrow; but all his calculations make it tonight."

"How soon, Eve?"

"In an hour, dear. You'll hear the bugles. He deceived even you."

"And Dave?" asked Tony jealously. Dave Ransdell now was his great friend. Dave was to be in command, except as to scientific matters, of the party in the second ship; Tony was himself second only to Hendron on the first ship; and Tony had no jealousy of Dave for that. Moreover, Eve was to travel in the ship with her father and Tony; if he was saved, so would be she! And Dave might, without them, be lost. Tony had told himself that he had conquered his

jealousy of Dave; but here it still held him.

"No," said Eve. "Father told Dave tomorrow, too. But we leave the earth tonight."

"So tomorrow," said Tony, "tomorrow we may be 'ourselves, with yesterday's seven thousand years.' I had plans—or dreams at least, Eve—of the last night on earth. It changes them to find it barely an hour."

"I should not have told you, Tony."

"Why? Would you have me go ahead with what I dreamed?"

"Why not?" she said. "An hour before the bugles; an hour before we leave the world, to fall back upon it from some frightful height, dear, and be shattered on this globe's shell; or to gain space and float on endlessly, starving and freezing in our little ship; or to fall on Bronson Alpha and die there. Or perhaps, Tony—perhaps, to live!"

"Perhaps," repeated Tony; but he had not, this time, gone from the world with her in his mind. He held her again and thought of his hour—the last hour of which he could be sure.

"Come away," he said. "Come farther away from—"

"From what, Tony?"

"From everybody else." And he drew her on. He led her, indeed, toward the edge of the encampment where the wires that protected it knitted a barrier. And there, holding her, he heard and she heard a child crying.

There were no children in the encampment. There never had been. No one with little children had been chosen. But here was a child.

Eve called to it, and the child ceased crying; so Eve had to call again for a response that would guide her to it in the dark. . . .

There were two children, together and alone. They were three and four years old, it appeared. They knew their names—Dan and Dorothy. They called for "Papa." Papa, it appeared, had brought them there in the dark and gone away. Papa had told them to stay there, and somebody would come.

EVE had her arms between the wires, and the children clung to her hands while they talked. Now Tony lifted them over the wires; and Eve took them in her arms.

In the awful "moonlight" of Bronson Alpha, the children clung to her; and the little girl asked if she was "Mamma."



The man stopped frequently to gesticulate and shout: "*C'est moi, Duquesnel!*"

Mamma, it appeared, had gone away a long time ago.

"Months ago only," Eve interpreted for Tony, "or they wouldn't remember her."

"Yes. Probably in the destruction of the first passage," Tony said; and they both understood that the mother must be dead.

"He brought them here to us," Eve said; and Tony understood that too. It was plain enough: Some father, who had heard of the camp and the Space Ships, had brought his children here and left them—going away, asking nothing for himself. . . .

Clear and loud in the night, a bugle blew; and Tony and Eve both started.

"Gabriel's horn," muttered Tony. "The last trumpet!"

"Father advanced the time," returned Eve. "He decided to give a few minutes more of warning; or else he fooled me, too."

"You are carrying that child?" asked Tony. Eve had the little girl.

"Yes," said Eve. "You are carrying the boy?"

"Yes," said Tony. "Rules or no rules; necessities or no necessities, if we can take sheep and goats, I guess we can take these two."

"I guess so," said Eve; and she strode strongly beside him into the edge of illumination as the great flood-lights blazed out.

The buildings were all alight; and everybody was bustling. The loading of the two Arks long ago had been completed, as Eve had said—except for the animals and the passengers and crew. The animals now were being driven aboard; and the passengers ran back and forth, calling, crying, shaking hands, embracing one another.

They were all to go; everyone in sight was billeted on the Space Ships; but some would be on one ship, some on the other. Would they meet again—on Bronson Alpha? Would either ship get there? Would they rise only to drop from a great height back upon this earth? What would happen?

Tony, hurrying to his station, appreciated how wisely Hendron had acted in deceiving them all—even himself—as to the night.

Here he was, second in command of the first Space Ship, carrying a strange child in contravention of all orders. The

chief commander's daughter also carried a child.

No one stopped them. Not Hendron himself. It was the last hour on earth, and men's minds were rocking.

The bugles blew again; and Tony, depositing the boy with Eve, set about his business of checking the personnel of his ship.

Three hundred yards away, Dave Ransdell checked the personnel of his larger party. Jessup and Kane, there, were in the navigating-room as Hendron was in the chief control-room here.

Ransdell, for a moment, ran over. He asked for Hendron, but he sought, also, Eve.

Tony did not interfere; he allowed them their last minutes together.

A third time the bugles blew. This meant: "All persons at ship stations!" All those who were to leave the earth forever, aboard ship!

CHAPTER XXIV

STARWARD HO!

TONY completed his check of crew and passengers. Thrice he blew his whistle.

From off to the right, where the second ship lay, Dave Ransdell's shrill signal answered.

"Close valves and locks!"

There was no one on the ground. No one! They were all aboard. All checked and tallied, thrice over. Yet as Tony left the last lock open to gaze out again and listen, he heard a faint cry. The father of the children?

Could he take him too? One man more? Of course they could make it. If it was only one man more, they must have him. Tony withheld the final signal.

With a quick command, he warned those who were closing the lock. It swung open again. The voice was faint and far away, and in its thin notes could be detected the vibrations of tense anxiety. Tony looked over the landscape and detected its direction. It came from the southwest, where the airplane-field lay. Presently he made out syllables, but not their meaning.

"Hello," he yelled mightily. "Who is it?"

Back came the thinly shouted reply: "*C'est moi, Duquesne! Attendez!*"

Tony's mind translated: "*It's I, Duquesne! Wait.*"

On the opposite side of the flying-field a lone human figure struggled into the rays of the flood-lights. It was the figure of a short fat man running clumsily, waving his arms and pausing at intervals to shout. Duquesne! The name had a familiar sound. Then Tony remembered. Duquesne was the French scientist in charge of building the French space ship that had been reported to him by James long ago. Instinctively he was sure that this Duquesne who ran ludicrously across the flying-field was the same man.

He turned to the attendants at the airlock.

"Get Hendron," he said; "he'll be in the stern control-room now. Tell him Duquesne is here alone." He operated the winch which moved the stairway back to the hull of the ship.

The short fat man trotted across the field, stopping frequently to gesticulate and shout: "*Attendez! C'est moi, Duquesne!*"

At last he scrambled up the steps of the concrete foundations to the ship. He rushed across the platform and arrived at the airlock. He was completely out of breath, and could not speak. Tony had an opportunity to look at him. He wore the remnants of a khaki uniform which did not fit him. Protruding from the breast pocket of the tunic was the butt of a revolver. He was black-haired, black-eyed and big-nosed. He regarded Tony with an intensity which was almost comical, and when he began to speak brokenly, he first swore in French and then said in English: "I am Duquesne! The great Duquesne! The celebrated Duquesne! The famous Duquesne. The French physicist, me, Duquesne. This I take for the ship of Cole 'Endron—yes? Then, so I am here. Tell him I have come from France in three months, running a steamboat by myself almost, flying across this foul country with my plane, which it is broken down near what was Milwaukee, and to here I have walked by myself alone these many days. You are going now, yes? I see you are going. Tell him to go. Tell him Duquesne is here. Tell him to come and see me. Tell him to come at once. Tell him I leave those pigs, those dogs, those cows, those onions, who would build such a foolish ship as they will break their necks in. I said it would not fly, I, Duquesne. I knew this 'Endron ship would fly, so I have come to it. Bah! They are stupid, my French colleagues. More

suitable for the motormen of trams than for flyers in the outer space!"

At that instant Hendron arrived at the top of the spiral staircase.

He rushed forward with his eyes alight. "Duquesne! By God, Duquesne! I'm delighted. You're in the nick of time. In forty minutes we would have been away from here."

DUQUESNE gripped Hendron's hand, and skipped around him as if he were playing a child's game. With his free fist he smote upon his breast. Whether he was ecstatic with joy or rage could not have been told, for he shouted so that the entire chamber reverberated: "Am I a fool that you should have to tell me what hour was set for your departure? Have I no brains? Do I know nothing about astronomy? Have I never studied physics? Have I run barefoot across this whole United States of America for no other reason than because I knew when you would have to leave? Do I not carry the day on the watch in my pocket? Idiots, charming friends, glorious Americans, fools! Have I no brain? Can I not anticipate? Here I am."

Suddenly after this broadside of violent speech he became calm. He let go of Hendron's hand and stopped dancing. He bowed very gravely, first to Hendron, then to Tony, then to the crew. "Gentlemen," he said, "let's be going. Let's be on our way."

Hendron turned to Tony, who in reaction burst into a paroxysm of laughter. For an instant the French scientist looked deeply wounded and as if he might burst into expletives of anger; then suddenly he began to laugh. "I am ridiculous, am I not?" he shouted. He roared with laughter. He rocked with it. He wrapped his arms around his ample frame, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. "It is magnificent," he said. "Yes. It is to laugh."

"What about the ships that were being built in other countries in Europe?" Hendron asked him.

"The English?" returned Duquesne. "They will get away. What then, who knows? Can you 'muddle-through' space, Cole Hendron? I ask it. But the English are sound; they have a good ship. But as to them, I have made my answer. I am here."

"The Germans?" demanded Hendron.

The Frenchman gestured. "Too advanced!"

"Too advanced?"

"They have tried to take every contingency into account—too many contingency! They will make the most beautiful voyage of all—or by far the worst. Again I reply, I am here. As to all the other, again I observe, I have preferred to be here."

And in that fashion Pierre Duquesne, France's greatest physicist, was at the eleventh hour and the fifty-ninth minute added to the company of the Ark. He went off with Hendron to the control-room, talking volubly. Tony superintended the closing of the lock. He went up the spiral staircase to the first passenger deck. Fifty people lay there on the padded surface with the broad belts already strapped around their legs and torsos. Most of them had not yet attached the straps intended to hold their heads in place. Their eyes were directed toward the glass screen, where alternately views of the heavens overhead and of the radiant landscape outside the Space Ship were being shown.

Tony looked at his number and found his place. Eve was near by him, with the two children beside her. She had sat up to welcome him. "I've been terribly nervous. Of course I knew you'd come, but it has been hard waiting here."

"We're all set," Tony said. "And the funniest thing in the world has just happened." He began to tell about the arrival of Duquesne, and everybody in the circular room listened to his story. As he talked, he adjusted himself on the floor harness.

BELOW, in the control-room, the men took their posts. Hendron strapped himself under the glass screen. He fixed his eyes to an optical instrument, across which were two hair lines. Very close to the point of their intersection was a small star. The instrument had been set so that when the star reached the center of the cross, the discharge was to be started. About him was a battery of switches which were controlled by a master switch, and a lever that worked not unlike a rheostat over a series of resistances. His control-room crew were fastened in their places with their arms free to manipulate various levers. Duquesne had taken the place reserved for one of the crew, and the man who had been displaced had been sent up to the passenger-cabins.

The French scientist glanced at his watch and put it back into his pocket

without speaking. Voluble though he was, he knew when it was time to be silent. His black, sparklike eyes darted appreciatively from one instrument to another in the chamber, and on his face was a rapt expression as his mind identified and explained what he saw. Hendron looked away from the optical instrument. "You religious, Duquesne?"

The Frenchman shook his head and then said: "Nevertheless, I am praying."

Hendron turned to the crossed hairs and began to count. Every man in the room stiffened to attention.

"One, two, three, four, five—" His hand went to the switch. The room was filled with a vibrating hum. "—Six, seven, eight, nine, ten—" The sound of the hum rose now to a feline shriek. "—Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen — ready! Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty—" His hand moved to the instrument that was like a rheostat. His other hand was clenched, white-knuckled, on his straps. "Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five." Simultaneously the crew shoved levers, and the rheostat moved up an inch. As he counted, signals flashed to the other ship. They must leave at the same moment.

A ROAR redoubling that which had resounded below the ship on the night of the attack, deafened all other sound.

Tony thought: "We're leaving the earth!" But strangely, thought itself at such a moment supplied no sensation. The physical shocks were too overpowering.

A quivering of the ship that jarred the soul. An upthrust on the feet. Hendron's lips moving in counting that could no longer be heard. The eyes of the men on the crew watching those lips so that when they reached fifty, a second switch was touched, and the room was plunged into darkness relieved only by the dim rays of tiny bulbs over the instruments themselves. A slight change in the feeling of air-pressure against the eardrums. Another forward motion of the steady hand on the rheostat. An increase of the thrust against the feet, so that the whole body felt leaden. Augmentation of the hideous din outside.

An exchange of glances between Hendron and Duquesne—both men's eyes flashing with triumph.

In the passenger-cabin, Tony's recita-

tion of the arrival of Duquesne was suddenly interrupted by the fiendish uproar. "We've started!" fifty voices shouted, and the words were soundless. The deck on which they lay pressed up against them. The glass screen overhead went dark. Tony reached toward Eve, and felt her hand stretching to meet his.

CHAPTER XXV

THE JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE

ON the doomed earth, observers must have seen the Space Ship lying brass-bright in the light of the Bronson Bodies and the cantonment flood-lamps, as immobile as if part of the earth. They must have seen it surrounded abruptly in golden fire, fire that drove toward the earth and lifted in immense clouds which bellowed and eddied toward the other larger ship simultaneously rising above a similar cloud. They must have heard the hideous torrent of sound, and then they must have seen the ship rise rapidly into the air on its column of flame. They must have watched it gain altitude vertically. They would have realized that it gathered momentum as it rose, and they would have seen that long trail of fire beneath each ship stretch and stretch as the shimmering cylinder shot into the night until it detached itself from the earth. But—there were no known observers left immediately below. If anyone from outside the camp had happened to approach too closely, he must certainly have been annihilated by the blast.

Tony, clinging to his straps, thought of the father who had brought the children; and Tony hoped, irrationally, that he had fled far away. But what difference whether he was annihilated alone now—or in the wreck of all the world a little later?

He could see the fiery trail of the second Ark rising skyward on its apex of scintillating vapor. Already it was miles away.

Below, on the earth, fires broke out—a blaze that denoted a forest burning. In the place where the ship had been, the two gigantic blocks of concrete must have crumbled and collapsed. The power-house, left untended, continued to hum, supplying lights for no living thing. Far away to the south and west, the President of the United States, surrounded by his Cabinet, looked up from the new toil engendered by the recommenc-

ing earthquakes, and saw, separated by an immeasurable distance, two comets moving away from the earth. The President looked reverently at the phenomenon; then he said: "My friends, the greatest living American has but now left his home-land."

In the passenger-chamber the unendurable noise rose in a steady crescendo until all those who lay there felt that their vital organs would be rent asunder by the fury of that sound. They were pressed with increasing force upon the deck. Nauseated, terrified, overwhelmed, their senses foundered, and many of them lapsed into unconsciousness.

TONY, who was still able to think, despite the awful acceleration of the ship, realized presently that the din was diminishing. From his rather scanty knowledge of physics he tried to deduce what was happening. Either the Ark had reached air so thin that it did not carry sound-waves, or else the Ark was traveling so fast that its sound could not catch up with it. The speed of that diminution seemed to increase. The chamber became quieter and quieter. Tony reflected, in spite of the fearful torment he was undergoing, that eventually the only sound which would afflict it would come from the breeches of the tubes in the control-rooms, and the rooms themselves would insulate that. Presently he realized that the ringing in his ears was louder than the noise made by the passage of the ship. Eve had relaxed the grip on his hand, but at that moment he felt a pressure.

It was impossible to turn his head. He said, "Hello," in an ordinary voice, and found he had been so deafened that it was inaudible. He tried to lift his hand, but the acceleration of the ship was so great that it required more effort than he was able yet to exert. Then he heard Eve's voice and he realized that she was talking very loudly: "Are you all right, Tony? Speak to me."

He shouted back: "I'm all right. How are the children?" He could see them lying stupefied, with eyes wide open.

"It's horrible, isn't it?" Eve cried.

"Yes, but the worst is over. We'll be accelerating for some time, though."

Energy returned to him. He struggled with the bonds that held his head, and presently spoke again to Eve. She was deathly pale. He looked at the other passengers. Many of them were still unconscious, most of them only partly

aware of what was happening. He tried to lift his head from the floor, but the upward pressure still overpowered him. He lay supine. Then the lights in the cabin went out and the screen was illuminated. Across one side was a glimpse of the trail which they were leaving, a bright hurtling yellow stream, but it was not that which held his attention. In the center of the screen was part of a curved disk. Tony realized that he was staring up at a half of the northern hemisphere of the Earth. The disk did not yet have the luminous quality that the moon used to possess. It was in a sort of hazy darkness which grew light on its eastern edge.

Tony thought he could make out the outline of Alaska on the west coast of the United States, and he saw pinpoints of light which at first he thought of as signs of human habitation, but which he presently realized must have represented vast brilliant areas. He identified them with the renewal of volcanic activity. The screen flashed. Another view appeared. Constellations of stars, such stars as he had never seen, blazing furiously in the velvet blackness of the outer sky. He realized that he was looking at the view to be had from the side of the ship. The light went out again, and a third of the four periscopes recorded its field. Again stars, but in their center and hanging away from them, as if in miraculous suspension, was a small round bright-red body which Tony recognized as Mars.

Once again Eve pressed his hand, and Tony returned the pressure.

IN the control-room, Hendron still sat in the sling with his hand on the rheostat.

His eyes traveled to a meter which showed their distance from the Earth. Then they moved on to a chronometer; then for an instant, as if in concession to his human curiosity, they darted to Duquesne. Duquesne had loosened himself from his sling and was lying on the floor, unable to rise. His expression in the dim light was extremely ludicrous. He struggled feebly, like a beetle that has been turned on its back, and Hendron smiled at him and pointed to the chronometer, but Duquesne did not seem to understand his meaning.

The control-room was filled with the throb that was contained in the breeches, but Hendron could do nothing to alleviate it. He had already determined the time necessary for acceleration,—one

hundred and twelve minutes,—and he could not shorten it. In the end, Duquesne managed to pull himself to a sitting position underneath the glass screen where he was perfectly content to sit and contemplate the heavens as they appeared in reflection from outer space.

Tony felt that he had been lying on the floor for an eternity. His strength had come back, and he realized that it would be possible to sit up, even to move



Hendron began to count: "One, two, three, four, five—" His hand went to the switch.

about, but they had been instructed to remain on the floor until the speed of their ascent was stabilized. Minutes dragged. It was becoming possible to converse in the chamber, but few people cared to say anything. Many of them were still violently ill. Others were glad to lie motionless, and watch the screen

as Duquesne was doing several decks below.

At three minutes of five, Hendron slowly moved back the handle of the rheostat, and almost abruptly conditions in the ship changed. The volume of sound radiating from the engine-room decreased. Hendron unbuckled his bonds and stepped from them. Duquesne stood up. He walked unsteadily across the floor to take the hand of Hendron.

"Magnificent! Stunning! Beautiful! Perfect! How fast do we now travel?" He was compelled to shout to make himself heard.

Hendron pointed at a meter; its indicator hovered between the figures 3,000 and 3,500.

"Miles?" the Frenchman asked.

Hendron nodded.

"Per hour?"

Hendron nodded again.

The Frenchman made his mouth into the shape required for a whistle, although no note could be heard.

Hendron operated the switch controlling the choice of periscopes. In the midst of the glass screen, the Earth now appeared as a round globe, its diameter in both directions clearly apparent. More than half of it lay in shadow, but the illuminated half was like a great relief map. The whole of the United States, part of Europe and the north polar regions, were revealed to their gaze. In wonder they regarded the world that had been their home. They could see clearly the colossal changes which had been wrought upon it. The great inland sea that occupied the Mississippi Valley sparkled in the morning sun. The myriad volcanoes which had sprung into being along the Western cordillera were for the most part hidden under a pall of smoke and clouds.

DUQUESNE pointed solemnly to that part of Europe that was visible. Hendron, looking at the screen for the first time, was shocked to see the disappearance of the Lowland Plain.

The Frenchman moved closer to him and shouted in his ear. "We abandoned the ship outside of Paris when we realized it was not on high enough ground. We started a new one in the Alps. I told those pigs: 'Gentlemen, it will melt. It is but wax. I know it.' They replied: 'If it melts, we shall perish.' I responded: 'If you perish, it shall be without me.' Suddenly the Frenchman popped out his watch. "*Sapristi!* The world

has turned so that these fools are to leave now." He moved his lips while he made a rapid calculation. "We shall observe, is it not so? In an hour my idiot friends will burn themselves to death. I shall laugh. I shall roar. I shall shout. It will be one grand joke. Yes, you will give me a focus upon France in this remarkable instrument of yours an hour from now, will you not?"

Hendron nodded. He signaled a command to his crew, who had been standing unbuckled from their slings, at attention. They now seated themselves.

Hendron shouted at the Frenchman: "Come on up with me. I'll introduce you to the passengers. I'm anxious to know about them."

WHEN Hendron reached the first deck of passengers' quarters, he found them standing together comparing notes on the sensations of space-flying. Many of them were rubbing stiff arms and legs. Two or three, including Eliot James, were still lying on the padded deck in obvious discomfort. They had turned on the lights, apparently more interested in their own condition than in the astounding vista of the Earth below. Tony had just opened the doors of the larder and was on the point of distributing sandwiches.

Hendron brought the shabby Duquesne into their midst.

"I'd like to present my friend Professor Pierre Duquesne of the French Academy, a last-minute arrival. I assure you that except for its monotony, the trip will offer you no further great discomfort until we reach Bronson Alpha, when we shall be under the necessity of repeating approximately the same maneuver. I want to call your attention to the following phenomena: In something less than an hour we are going to turn the periscope on France in an effort to observe the departure of the French equivalent of our ships. We are at the moment engaged in trying to locate our second Ark, which took its course at a distance from us to avoid any chance of collision, and being between us and the sun, is now temporarily lost in the glare of the sun.

"I will have the sun thrown on the screen at intervals, as some of the phenomena are extremely spectacular. At about mid-point of our voyage we will concentrate our attention on the collision between the earth and Bronson Beta. I think at this point I may express my satisfaction in the behavior of the Ark.

As you all are aware, we have escaped from the earth. We are still well within the field of its gravitational control, in the sense that if our propellent forces ceased, we undoubtedly would fall back upon the earth; but the pull of gravity is constantly weakening. It diminishes, as most of you know, not directly in relation to the distance, but in relation to the square of the distance. It is the great lessening of the pull of gravity which has ended our extreme distress.

"Except for the small chance of striking an astrolite, we are quite safe and will continue so for some time. When we approach Bronson Alpha, our situation will, of course, become more difficult. You will please excuse me now, as I wish to convey the same information to the passengers on the deck above."

Hendron departed, and his feet disappeared through the opening in the ceiling which contained the spiral staircase.

Duquesne immediately made himself the center of attention, praising alternately Hendron's ship and his own prowess in completing the journey from France. The reaction from the initial strain of the voyage took, in him, the form of saluting, shouting, joking with the men and flirting with the women.

TONY saw to the distribution of food and water. The ship rushed through the void so steadily that cups of milk, which Eve held to the lips of the children, scarcely spilled over. The passengers, having eaten a little, found that they could move from floor to floor without great trouble, and several became garrulous. The ship was spinning very slowly, exposing one side after the other to the sun, and this served to equalize the temperature, which was fiery hot on the sun-side, deadly cold on the other.

Fans distributed the air inside the ship. Outside, there was vacuum against which the airlocks were sealed. The air of the ship, breathed and "restored," was not actually fresh, although chemically it was perfectly breathable. The soft roar of the rocket propulsion-tubes fuddled the senses. There was no sensation of external time, no appreciation of traveling from morn to night. The sun glared in a black sky studded with brilliant stars. . . . The sun showed its corona, its mighty, fiery prominences, its huge leaping tongues of flame.

To the right of the sun, the great glowing crescents of Bronson Alpha and Bronson Beta loomed larger and larger.

Eve sat with Tony as a periscope turned on them and displayed them on the screen. They could plainly see that Bronson Beta was below and approaching the earth; Bronson Alpha, slowly turning, was higher and much nearer the ship.

"Do you see their relation?" she asked.

"Between the Bronson Bodies?" said Tony. "Aren't they nearer together than they have ever been before?"

"Much nearer; and as Father—and Professor Bronson—calculated. Bronson Alpha, being much the smaller and lighter, was revolving about Bronson Beta. The orbit was not a circle; it was a very long ellipse. Sometimes, therefore, this brought Bronson Alpha much closer to Beta than at other times. When they went around the sun, the enormous force of the sun's attraction further distorted the orbit, and Bronson Alpha probably is nearer Beta now than it ever was before. Also, notice it is at the point in its orbit which is most favorable for us."

"You mean for our landing on it?" asked Tony.

"For that; and especially is it favorable to us, after we land—if we do," amended Eve; and she gathered the children to her. She sat between them, an arm about each, gazing at the screen.

"You see, the sun has now 'captured' Bronson Beta and Bronson Alpha. It seems certain that, from now on, they must both revolve about the sun, but in a satisfactory sort of orbit—unless something happens. And the something is going to happen. Bronson Beta will strike the world. That will destroy the world, and send Bronson Beta off in another sort of ellipse—or perhaps a hyperbola. No one can quite calculate that; but it will free Bronson Alpha from the domination of Bronson Beta, and leave us a much more satisfactory orbit about our sun."

"Us?" echoed Tony.

"Us—if we get there," said Eve; and she bent and kissed the children. "What purpose could there be in all that,"—she nodded to the screen when she straightened,—"if some of us aren't to get there? We see God not only sending us that world, Tony,"—she spoke a little impatiently,—"but arranging for us an orbit for it about the sun which will let us live."

"Do you know the Wonder Clock?" Danny, the little boy, looked up and demanded. "Do you know Peterkin and the lil' Gray Hare?"

"Certainly," said Eve. "Once there was a giant—"

AT the end of the hour all the lights in the passenger quarters were turned out, and the Earth was again flashed on the screen. Its diminution in size was already startling; and the remains of Europe, stranded in a new ocean, looked like a child's model flour-and-water map.

Duquesne lay on his back on deck and stared up at the scenery. He gave an informal lecture as he looked. "As we are flinging ourselves away from the Earth below, we are putting distance between ourselves and a number of prize fools. These fellows are my best friends. You will pick out faintly the map of Europe. Directly south of those shadows which were once the British Isles, you see the configuration of the Alps. In the center of the western range are the fools of whom I spoke. At any moment now, providing we are able to see anything at all, we shall witness their effort at departure. They built a ship not dissimilar to this, but unfortunately relying upon another construction than that



valuable little metal discovered by Mr. —whatever his name is. I have told them they shall melt. I hope that we shall be able to see the joke of that fusion."

Duquesne glanced again at his watch, and looked up at the screen on which, like a stereopticon picture, hung the



On the doomed earth, observers must have seen the ship rise into the air on its column of flame.

Earth. Suddenly he sat bolt upright. "Did I not tell you?"

A point of light showed suddenly in the spot he had designated. It was very bright, and as a second passed, it appeared to extend so that it stood away from the Earth like a white-hot needle. Tony and Eve and many others glanced at Duquesne.

But Duquesne was not laughing as he had promised. Instead he sat with his head bent back, his hands doubled into fists which pounded his knees, while in an outpouring of French he cajoled and pleaded frantically with that distant streak of fire.

The seconds passed slowly. Everyone under the glass screen realized that here, perhaps, would be companions for them after they had reached Bronson Alpha. Since they had just undergone the experience which they knew the Frenchmen were suffering in their catapulted departure from the Alps, they watched gravely and breathlessly. Only the rocket trail of the ship could be seen, as the ship itself was too small and too far away to be visible.

Duquesne was standing. He suddenly seemed conscious of those around him. "They go, they go, they go, they go! Maybe they have solved this problem. Maybe they will be with us."

SUDDENLY a groan escaped him. The upshooting light curved, became horizontal and shot parallel with Earth, moving apparently with such speed that it seemed to have traversed a measurable fraction of the Alps while they watched.

Abruptly, then, the trail zigzagged; it curved back toward the Earth, and the French ship commenced to descend, impelled by its own motors. In another second there was a faint glow and then—only a luminous trail, which disappeared rapidly, like the pathway of fire left by a meteor.

Duquesne did not laugh. He wept.

THEY tried to console him but he shrugged them away angrily. After a long time he began to talk, and they listened with sympathy. "Jean Delavoi was there, handsome Jean. And Captain Vivandi. Marcel Jamar, my own nephew, the greatest biologist of the new generation. And yet I told them, but it was their only hope, so they were stubborn." He looked at the people in the chamber. "Did you see? It melted. First the right tubes, throwing it on a horizontal course, then all of it. It was quickly over—*grâce à Dieu*."

But other flashes rose and traveled on. The English, the Germans, perhaps the Italians had got away.

The implications of these sights transcended talk. Conversation soon ceased. Exhaustion, spiritual and physical, assailed the travelers. Eve's children fell into a sleep like stupor. The motion of the ship seemed no more than a slight sway, and those who remained awake found it possible to talk in more ordinary tones.

Gravity diminished steadily, so that gestures were easier to make than they had been on Earth. Time lost all sequence. Twelve hours in the past seemed like an eternity spent in a prison; and only the waning Earth, which was frequently flashed on the screen by men in the control-room, marked progress to the passengers. They were spent by their months of effort and by the emotional strains through which they had passed. Stupefied like the children by the unusualness of this voyage, they were no longer worldly beings, but because all their vision of outer space came vicariously, their sensations were rather of being confined in a small place than of being lost and alone in the unfathomable void.

Their habit of relying upon the attractive force of the Earth resulted in an increasing number of mishaps, some of them amusing and some of them painful. After what seemed like eons of time some one asked Tony for more food. Tony himself could not remember whether he was going to serve the fifth meal or the sixth, but he sprang to his feet with earnest willingness—and promptly shot clear to the ceiling, against which he bumped his head. He fell back to the floor with a jar and rose laughing. The ceiling was also padded, so that he had not hurt himself.

The sandwiches were wrapped in wax paper, and when some one on the edge of

the crowd asked that his sandwich be tossed, Tony flipped it toward him, only to see it pass high over the man's head and entirely out of reach, and strike against the opposite wall. The man himself stretched to catch the wrapped sandwich, and sat down again rubbing his arm, saying that he had almost thrown his shoulder out of joint.

People walked in an absurd manner, stepping high into the air as if they were dancers. Gestures were uncontrollable, and it was unsafe to talk excitedly for fear one would hit one's self in the face.

Before this condition reached its crisis, however, Hendron himself appeared in the passenger-cabin for one of his frequent visits. He arrived, not by way of the staircase, but by way of the cable which was strung tautly inside the spiral, hauling himself up hand over hand with greater ease and rapidity than was ever exhibited by any sailor. He was greeted with pleasure—any slight incident had an exaggerated effect upon the passengers; but his demeanor was serious.

"I want you all to be witnesses of the reason for this journey," he said soberly.

He switched off the lights. The screen glowed, and on it they saw the Earth. At the hour of their departure the Earth had occupied much more than the area in the screen now reflected overhead, darkened on one side as if it were a moon in its third quarter, or not quite full. At the very edge of the screen was a bright curve which marked the perimeter of Bronson Beta. Bronson Alpha could not be seen.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CRASH OF TWO WORLDS

NOW for an hour the passengers watched silently as Bronson Beta swept upon the scene, a gigantic body, weird, luminous and unguessable, many times larger than Earth. It moved toward the Earth with the relentless perceptibility of the hands of a large clock, and those who looked upon its awe-inspiring approach held their breaths.

Once again Hendron spoke. "What will take place now cannot be definitely ascertained. In view of the retardation of Bronson Beta's speed caused by its collision with the moon, I have reason to believe that its course will be completely disrupted."

Inch by inch, as it seemed, the two

bodies came closer together. Looking at the screen was like watching the motion picture of a catastrophe and not like seeing it. Tony had to repeat to himself over and over that it was really so, in order to make himself believe it. Down there on the little earth were millions of scattered, demoralized human beings. They were watching this awful phenomenon in the skies. Around them the ground was rocking, the tides were rising, lava was bursting forth, winds were blowing, oceans were boiling, fires were catching, and human courage was facing complete frustration. Above them the sky was filled with this awful on-rushing mass.

To those who through the smoke and steam and hurricane could still pierce the void, it would appear as something no longer stellar but as something real, something they could almost reach out and touch. A vast horizon of earth stretched toward them across the skies. They would be able, if their reeling senses still maintained powers of observation, to see the equally tumultuous surface of Bronson Beta, to describe the geography of its downfalling side. They would perhaps, in the last staggering seconds, feel themselves withdrawn from the feeble gravity of their own Earth, to fall headlong toward Bronson Beta. And in the magnitude of that inconceivable manifestation, they would at last, numb and senseless, be ground to the utmost atoms of their composition.

Tony shuddered as he watched. A distance, short on the screen—even as solar measurements are contemplated—separated the two planets. In the chamber of the hurtling Space Ship no one moved. Earth and Bronson Beta were but a few moments apart. It seemed that even at their august distance they could perceive motion on the planet, as if the continents below them were swimming across the seas, as if the seas were hurling themselves upon the land; and presently they saw great cracks, in the abysses of which were fire, spread along the remote dry land. Into the air were lifted mighty whirls of steam. The nebulous atmosphere of Bronson Beta touched the air of Earth, and then the very Earth bulged. Its shape altered before their eyes. It became plastic. It was drawn out egg-shaped. The cracks girdled the globe. A great section of the Earth itself lifted up and peeled away, leaping toward Bronson Beta with an inconceivable force.

The two planets struck.

Decillions of tons of mass colliding in cosmic catastrophe.

"IT'S not direct," Duquesne shouted. "Oh, God! Perhaps—"

Everyone knew what he was thinking. Perhaps they were not witnessing complete annihilation. Perhaps some miracle would preserve a portion of the world.

They panted and stared.

Steam, fire, smoke. Tongues of flame from the center of the earth. The planets ground together and then moved across each other. It was like watching an eclipse. The magnitude of the disaster was veiled by hot gases and stupendous flames, and was diminished in awfulness by the intervening distances and by the seeming slowness with which it took place.

Bronson Beta rode between them and the Earth. Then—on its opposite side—fragments of the shattered world reappeared. Distance showed between them—widening, scattering distance. Bronson Beta moved away on its terrible course, fiery, flaming.

The views on the visagraph changed quickly. The sun showed its furious flames. The telescopic periscopes concentrated on the fragment of the earth.

"They're calculating," Hendron said.

During a lull of humble voices Kyto could be heard praying to strange gods in Japanese. Eliot James drummed on the padded floor with monotonous fingertips. Tony clenched Eve's hand. Time passed—it seemed hours. A man hurried down the spiral staircase.

He went directly to Hendron. "First estimates ready," he said.

Hendron's voice was tense: "Tell us."

"I thought perhaps—"

"Go ahead, Von Beitz. These people aren't children; besides, they have given up all expectations of the earth."

"They have seen the first result," Von Beitz replied. "The earth is shattered. Unquestionably much of its material merged with Bronson Beta; but most is scattered in fragments of various masses which will assume orbits of their own about the sun."

"And Bronson Beta?"

"We have made only a preliminary estimate of its deceleration and its deviation from its original course; but it seems to have been deflected so that it will follow a hyperbola into space."

"Hyperbola, eh?"

"Probably."

"That means," Hendron explained loudly, "we will have seen the last of Bronson Beta. It will not return to the sun. It will leave our solar system forever. —And Bronson Alpha?" Hendron turned to the German.

"As we have hoped, the influence of Bronson Beta over Bronson Alpha is terminated. The collision occurred at a moment which found Bronson Alpha at a favorable point in its orbit about Bronson Beta. Favorable, I mean, for us. Bronson Alpha will not follow Beta into space. Its orbit becomes independent; Bronson Alpha, almost surely, will circle the sun."

Some of the women burst out crying in a hysteria of relief. The world was gone; they had seen it shattered; but another would take its place. For the first time they succeeded in feeling this.

A SHORT time later, a man arose to bring the women water; he remained suspended in the air!

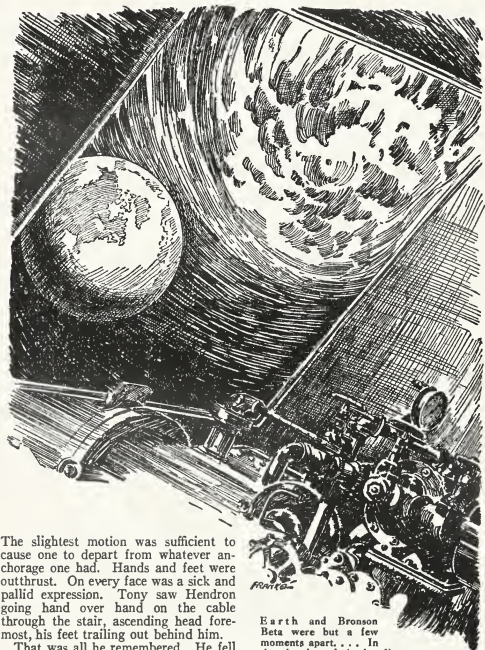
Tony reached up and turned on the lights. The man who floated was sinking slowly toward the floor, his face blank with amazement.

"We have come," announced Tony loudly, "very close to the point between Bronson Beta and Bronson Alpha where the gravity of one neutralizes the gravity of the other. Bronson Beta and the fragments of our world, pulling one way, strike an equilibrium here with the pull of Bronson Alpha, which we are approaching."

He saw Eve lifting the children and leaving them suspended in the air. For an instant they enjoyed it; then it frightened them. A strange panic ensued. Tony's heart raced. It was difficult to breathe. When he swallowed, it choked him; and as he swam through the air with every step, he felt himself growing faint, dizzy and nauseated.

He saw Eve, as if through a mist, make a motion to reach for the children, and rise slowly into the air, where she stretched at full length groping wildly for the children. Tony swam over to her and pushed them into her arms. His brain roared; but he thought: "Is this psychological or physical? Was it a physical result of lack of all weight or was it the oppressiveness of sensation?" He shouted the question to Eve, who did not reply.

The air was becoming filled with people. Almost no one was on the deck.



The slightest motion was sufficient to cause one to depart from whatever anchorage one had. Hands and feet were outthrust. On every face was a sick and pallid expression. Tony saw Hendron going hand over hand on the cable through the stair, ascending head foremost, his feet trailing out behind him.

That was all he remembered. He fell into coma.

When his senses returned, he found himself lying on the deck under half a dozen other people, but their weight was not oppressive. The pile above him would have crushed anyone on Earth, but here it made no difference. His limbs felt cold and weak; his heart still beat furiously. He struggled to free himself, and succeeded with remarkable ease. A wave of nausea brought him to his knees, and he fainted again, striking the floor lightly and bouncing into the air several times before he came to rest. . . .

Earth and Bronson Beta were but a few moments apart. . . . In the chamber of the hurtling Space Ship no one moved.

Again consciousness returned.

This time he rolled over carefully and did not attempt to rise. He was lying on something hard and cold. He explored it with his fingers, and realized dully that it was the glass screen which projected the periscope views. It was the ceiling, then, on which the passengers were lying in a tangled heap, and not the deck. Their positions had been reversed. He thought that he was stone deaf, and then perceived that the noise

of the motors had stopped entirely. They were falling toward Bronson Alpha, using gravity and their own inertia to sustain that downward flight. He understood why he had seen Hendron pulling himself along the staircase. Hendron had been transferring to the control-room at the opposite end of the ship.

TONY'S eyes moved in a tired and sickly fashion to the tangle of people. He knew that since he was the first to regain consciousness, it was his duty to disentangle them and make them as comfortable as possible. He crawled toward them. Whole people could be moved as if they were toy balloons. With one arm he would grasp a fixed belt on the deck, and with the other he would send a body rolling across the floor to the edge of the room. The passengers were breathing, gasping, hiccoughing; their hearts were pounding; their faces

were stark white; but they seemed to be alive. The children were dazed but unhurt. Tony was unable to do more than to give them separate places in which to lie. After that, his own addled and confused body succumbed, and he lay down again, panting. He knew that they would be all right as soon as the gravity from Bronson Alpha became stronger. He knew that the voyage was more than half finished; but he was so sick, so weak, that he did not care. He fell into a state between sleep and coma.

Some one woke him. "We're eating. How about a sandwich?"



He sat up. The gravity was still very slight, but strong enough to restore his sensations to something approaching normal. He stared around the circular room which had become so familiar in the past hours. An attempt at a grin overspread his features. He reached inaccurately for the sandwich, and murmured his thanks.

An hour later conditions were improved for moving about the chamber, by the starting of the motors which were to decelerate the ship. The floor was firm again. On the screen now at their feet they could see Bronson Alpha. It was white like an immense moon, but veiled in clouds. Here and there bits of its superficial geography were visible. They gathered around the screen, kneeling over it, the lurid light which the planet cast glowing up on their faces. In four hours the deceleration had been greatly increased. In six, Bronson Alpha was visibly spreading on the screen. Deceleration held them tightly on the floor, but they would crawl across each other laboriously, and in turn stare at the floating, cloudy sphere upon which they expected to arrive.

THE screen changed views now. It halted to catch the flight of Bronson Beta from the sun, but most of the time those who operated it were now busy searching for the other American ship, of which they had seen no trace.

The hours dragged more, even, than they had on the outward journey. The surface of the planet ahead of them was disappointingly shrouded, as inspected for the last time. A word of warning went through the ship. The passengers took another drink of water, ate another mouthful of food, and once again strapped themselves to the floor. Hendron tripped the handle of a companion to the rheostat-like instrument in the far end of the ship. He fixed a separate telescope so that he could see into it. He looked critically at his gauges. He turned on more power.

A half-hour passed, and he did not budge. His face was taut. The dangers of space had been met. Now came the last great test. At his side again was Duquesne. Above him, in layers, were the terrified animals and the half-insensible passengers. So great was the pressure of retardation that it was almost impossible for him to move, and yet it was necessary to do so with great delicacy. A fractional miscalculation would

mean that all his work had gone for nothing.

In the optical instrument to which he screwed his eye, the edges of Bronson Alpha had long since passed out of view. He stared at a bright foaming mass of what looked like clouds. A vast abyss separated him from those clouds, and yet its distance shortened rapidly. He looked at the gauge that measured their altitude from the surface of the planet, and at the gauge which reckoned their speed.

Duquesne followed his movements with eyes eloquent of his emotions.

SUDDENLY the clouds seemed to rush up toward him.

Hendron pressed a stud. The retardation was perceptibly increased. Sound began to pour in awful volumes to their ears.

Duquesne's eyes jerked up to the altimeter, which showed eighty-six miles. It was falling rapidly. The clouds on the screen were thicker. They fell through atmosphere. The roar increased and became as insufferable as it had been when they left the Earth. Perspiration leaked down Hendron's face and showed darkly through the heavy shirt he wore. The altimeter ran with diminishing speed from fifty miles to twenty-five. From twenty-five it crawled to ten. From ten to five. It seemed scarcely to be moving now.

Suddenly Hendron's lips jerked spasmodically, and a quiver ran through the hand on the rheostat. He pointed toward the screen with his free hand, and Duquesne had his first view of the new world. The same view flashed through the remnants of cloud to all the passengers. Below them was a turbulent rolling ocean. Where the force of their blasts struck it, it flung back terrific clouds of steam. They descended to within a mile of its surface, and then Hendron, operating another lever, sent out horizontal jets, so that the ship began to move rapidly over the surface of this unknown sea.

To everyone who looked, this desolate expanse of ocean was like a beneficent blessing from God Himself. Here was something familiar, something interesting, something terrestrial. Here was no longer the incomprehensible majesty of the void.

The Space Ship had reached the surface of Bronson Alpha and was traveling now at a slow, lateral velocity above one of the oceans. Hendron worked fran-

tically with the delicate controls to keep the ship poised and in regular motion; yet it rose and fell like an airplane bounding in rough winds, and it swayed on its horizontal axis so that its pilot ceaselessly played his fingertips on the releases of the quick blasts which maintained equilibrium.

The sullen, sunless ocean seemed endless. Was there no land?

Where were the continents, where the island and plains and the sites of the "cities" which the great telescopes of earth—the telescopes of that shattered world which survived now only in fragments spinning around the sun—once had shown? Had the cities, had the mountains and plains, been mere optical illusions?

That was impossible; yet impatience never had maddened men as now. Still the views obtainable from the side periscope flashed upon the screen and showed nothing but empty sea and lowering cloud.

Then, on the far horizon, land appeared dimly.

ACRY, a shout that drowned in the tumult of the motors, broke from trembling lips. Speedily they approached the land. It spread out under them. It towered into hills. Its extent was lost in the mists. They reached its coast, a bleak inhospitable stretch of brown earth and rock, of sandy beach and cliff upon which nothing grew or moved or was. Inland the country rose precipitously; and Hendron, as if he shared the impatience of his passengers and could bear no more, turned the ship back toward a plateau that rose high above the level of the sea.

Along the plateau he skimmed at a speed that might have been thirty terrestrial miles an hour. The Ark drew down toward the new Earth until it was but a few feet above the ground. The speed diminished, the motors were turned off and on again quickly, a maneuver which jolted those who lay strapped in their places. There was a very short, very rapid drop; bodies were thrown violently against the padded floor; the springs beneath them recoiled—and there was silence.

Regardless of the fate of the others, the fate of Earth itself, Hendron with his hundred colonists had reached a new world alive.

The ship settled at a slight angle in the earth and rock beneath it.

The Ark was filled with a new sound—the sound of human voices raised in hysterical bedlam.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE COSMIC CONQUERORS

COLE HENDRON turned to Duquesne. The bedlam from the passenger-cabin came to their ears faintly. On the visa-screen above them was depicted the view from one of the sides of the ship—a broad stretch of rolling country, bare and brown, vanishing toward ascending hills and gray mist. Hendron had relaxed for the first time in the past eight months, and he stood with his hands at his sides, his shoulders stooped and his knees bent. He looked as Atlas might have looked when Hercules lifted the world from his shoulders. It was an expression more descriptive than any words might have been.

Duquesne emotions found speech. "Miraculous! Marvelous! Superb! Ah, my friend, my good friend, my old friend, my esteemed friend! I congratulate you. I, Duquesne, I throw myself at your feet. I embrace your knees; I salute you. You have conquered Destiny itself. You have brought this astounding ship of yours to the Alpha Bronson. To you, Christopher Columbus is a nincompoop. Magellan is a child drooling over his toys. Listen to them upstairs there, screaming. Their hearts are flooded. Their eyes are filled. Their souls expand. Through you, today, humanity opens a new epoch!"

The Frenchman could not confine his celebration to the control-cabin. He seized Hendron and hauled him to the spiral staircase which functioned as well inverted as it had right-side up. He thrust Hendron before him into the first chamber, where the passengers from both decks were crowding. Duquesne himself was ignored; and he did not mind it.

"Hendron!" rose the shout; and men and women, almost equally hysterical, rushed to him. They had to clap hands on him, touch him, cry out to him.

Tony found himself shouting an excited harangue to which no one was paying attention. He discovered Eve at his side, struggling toward her father, and weeping. Some one recognized her and thrust her through the throng.

Men and women were throwing their arms about each other, kissing, and screaming in each other's faces. Du-

quesne, ignored and indifferent to it, made his way through the throng thumping the backs of the men and embracing the women, and beating on his own chest. Eliot James, who had been deathly ill during the entire transit, abruptly forgot his sickness, was caught in the tumult of the first triumph, and then withdrew to the wall and watched his fellows rejoice.

At last some one opened the larder and brought out food. People who had eaten practically nothing for the four days began to devour everything they could get their hands upon.

Tony, meanwhile, had somewhat recovered himself. He made a quick census and shouted: "We all are here. Everyone who started on this ship survived!"

It set off pandemonium again, but also it reminded them of doubt of the safety of the second ship. "Where is it? Can it be sighted? . . . How about the Germans? . . . The English? . . . The Japanese?"

Their own shouts quieted them, so that Hendron at last could speak.

"We have had, for three days, no sight of our friends or of any of the other parties from earth," he announced. "That does not mean that they all have failed; our path through space was not the only one. Some may have been ahead of us and arrived when the other side of this world was turned; others may still arrive; but you all understand that we can count upon no one but ourselves.

"We have arrived; that we know. And none of you will question my sincerity when I repeat to you that it is my conviction that fate—Destiny—far more than our own efforts has brought us through.

"I repeat here, in my first words upon this strange, new, marvelous world what I said upon that planet which for millions and hundreds of millions of years supported and nourished the long life of evolution which created us—I repeat, what I said upon that planet which now flies in shattered fragments about our sun; we have arrived, not as triumphant individuals spared for ourselves, but as humble representatives of the result of a billion years of evolution transported to a sphere where we may reproduce and recreate the life given us. . . .

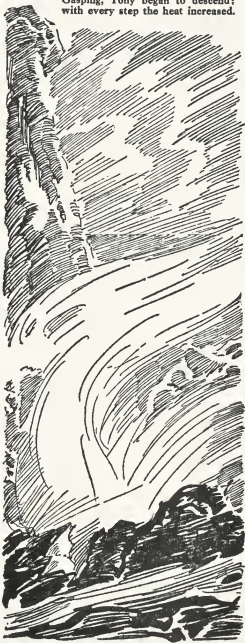
"I will pass at once to practical considerations.

"At this spot, it is now late in the

afternoon of Bronson Alpha's new day, which lasts thirty hours instead of the twenty-four to which we are accustomed. For the present, we must all remain upon the ship. The ground immediately under is still baked hot by the heat of our blast at landing. Moreover we must test the atmosphere carefully before we breathe it.

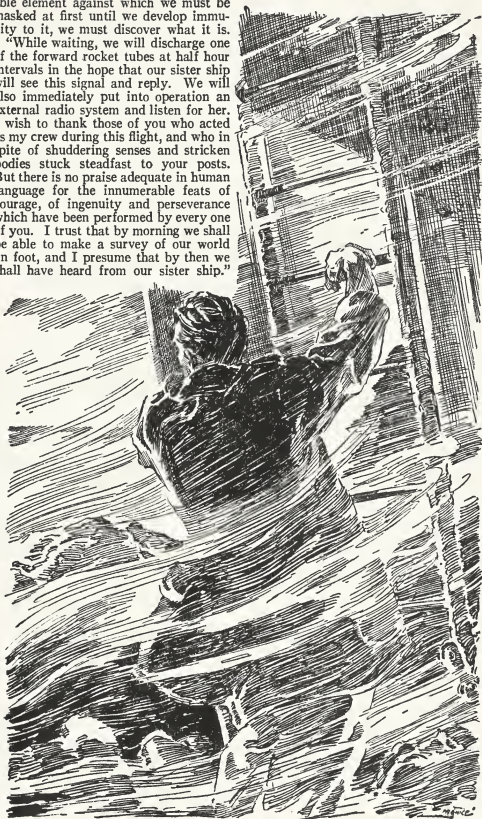
"Of course, if it is utterly unbreathable, we will all perish soon; but if it proves merely to contain some unfavor-

Gasping, Tony began to descend; with every step the heat increased.



able element against which we must be masked at first until we develop immunity to it, we must discover what it is.

"While waiting, we will discharge one of the forward rocket tubes at half hour intervals in the hope that our sister ship will see this signal and reply. We will also immediately put into operation an external radio system and listen for her. I wish to thank those of you who acted as my crew during this flight, and who in spite of shuddering senses and stricken bodies stuck steadfast to your posts. But there is no praise adequate in human language for the innumerable feats of courage, of ingenuity and perseverance which have been performed by every one of you. I trust that by morning we shall be able to make a survey of our world on foot, and I presume that by then we shall have heard from our sister ship."



EVE and Tony walked back and forth through the throng of passengers, arm in arm. Greetings and discussions continued incessantly. Everyone was talking. Presently some one began to sing, and all the passengers joined in.

Up in the control-room Hendron and his assistants began their analysis of a sample of atmosphere that had been obtained through a small airlock. They rigged up the ship's wireless, and sent into the clouds the first beacon from the Ark's sky-pointing tubes. Lights were on all over the ship. Above the passenger quarters, several men were releasing and tending stock. The sheep and a few of the birds had perished, but the rest of the animals revived rapidly.

One of Hendron's assistants put a slip of paper before his chief. He read it:

Nitrogen	43%
Oxygen	24%
Neon	13%
Krypton	6%
Argon	5%
Helium	4%
Other gases	5%

Hendron looked at the list thoughtfully and took a notebook from a rack over the table. He glanced at the assistant and smiled. "There's only about a three-per-cent error in our telescopic analysis. It will be fair enough to breathe."

The assistant, Borden, smiled. He had been, in what the colonists came to describe as "his former life," a professor of chemistry in Stanford University. His smile was naïve and pleasing. "It's very good to breathe. In fact, I drew in a large sample and breathed what was left over for about five minutes. It felt like air; it looked like air; and I think we might consider it a very superior form of air—remarkably fresh, too."

Hendron chuckled. "All right, Borden. What about the temperature?"

"Eighty-six degrees Fahrenheit, top side of the ship—but the ground all around has been pretty highly heated, and the blast from the beacon also helped warm up the air. I should conjecture that the temperature is really about seventy-eight degrees. I didn't pick up much of that heat, because our thermometer is on the windward side."

Hendron nodded slowly. "Of course I don't know our latitude and longitude yet, but that seems fair enough. Pressure?"

"Thirty-point one hundred thirty-five ten thousandths."

"Wind-velocity?"

"Eighteen miles an hour."

"Humidity?"

"Seventy-four per cent. But if I'm any judge of weather, it's clearing up."

"That's fine. We'll go out in the morning."

Another man approached the desk. "The radio set is working, Mr. Hendron. There's terrific static in bursts, but in the intervals listening has been pretty good. Everything's silent. I don't think anybody else made it."

"Right. You take the receivers until midnight on the new time, then put Tarleton on for four hours and let Grange have it until dawn, and then Von Beitz. No one will leave the ship tonight. I believe that the situation here is favorable; but we will need every advantage for our first experience upon this planet. So we will wait for the sun."

THE night came on clear. The viscreen, which had been growing darker, showed now a dim, steady light. It was the light of the earth-destroyer Bronson Beta, shining again upon the survivors of men as it set off on its measureless journey into infinite space. Other specks of light reinforced it; and the stars—glints from the debris of the world settling themselves in their strange circles about the sun.

Exhaustion allied itself to obedience to Hendron's orders. The emigrants from Earth slumped down and slept. Hendron strode quietly through the dimly lighted chambers, looking at the sleeping people with an expression almost paternal on his face. Within him leaped an exultation so great that he could scarcely contain it. . . .

Tony lay down but did not sleep. Around him the members of the expedition lay in attitudes of rest. A thought had been stirring in his brain for a long time. Some one would have to take the risk of being the first to breathe the air of Bronson Beta. A small sample was not decisive. Tony did not know how accurately its composition might have been measured. He thought that it might have an evil smell. It might be sickening. It might be chemically possible to breathe, but practically, hopeless. It might contain a trace of some rare poison that, repeatedly breathed, would kill instantly or in time.

He should test it himself. They should send him out first. If he did not go into spasms of nausea and pain, the rest

could follow. It was a small contribution, in Tony's mind; but it would help justify his presence on the Ark. He had considered offering himself for this service for so long that he had created in his subconscious mind a true and very real fear of the possibilities in the atmosphere of Bronson Alpha.

"They might send some one useful," he thought. "Hendron might sacrifice himself in the test."

The more he thought, the more he worried. His mind began to plan. If he wished, he could open the airlock and drop down to the ground. Of course, he could not get back without making a fuss—stoning the periscope outlet—and he might not remain conscious long enough. But in that case—his body would be a warning when they looked out in the morning. . . .

At last he rose. He went down the spiral staircase quietly. He shut doors behind him. In the bottom chamber he stood for a long time beside the airlock. He was trembling.

It did not enter his mind that the honor of being the first to step on the soil of Bronson Alpha rightfully belonged to Hendron. It was self-sacrifice and not ambition which prompted him.

He lifted the levers that closed the inner door, balancing them so that they would fall automatically. He stepped between it and the outer door. The lock slammed; the levers fell. He was in pitch darkness.

He opened the outside door. He leaned out—his heart in his mouth. He drew in a breath.

A HOT, rasping, sulphurous vapor smote his nostrils. He shuddered. Was this the atmosphere of the new planet? He remembered that the blast of the Ark had cooked the ground around it.

Gasping, with running eyes, he lay down on the floor and felt with his feet for the iron rungs of the workmen's ladder that ran from the now inverted bow of the Ark to the upper door and matched that on the opposite end. He began to descend. He coughed and shuddered. With every step the heat increased.

His foot touched the ground. It gave off heat like the earth around a geyser. He ran away from the looming bulk of the ship. His first fifty steps were taken in the stinging vapors.

Then—cooler air blew on his face. Sweet, fresh cool air!

He inhaled lungfuls of it. It had no odor. It was like earth air washed by an April rain. It did not make him dizzy or sick. He did not feel weakness or numbness or pain. He felt exhilarated.

He flung out his arms in ecstasy. It was a dancer's gesture, a glorious, abandoned gesture. He could make it only because he was alone—alone on the new earth. Bronson Alpha's atmosphere was magnificent.

He flung his arms again.

BESIDE him a voice said quietly: "It's splendid, isn't it, Tony?"

He could have been no more startled if stones had spoken or a mummy had sat up in its sarcophagus. He stiffened, not daring to look. Then into his icy veins blood flowed. He had recognized the voice. He turned in the lush, starlit dark.

"Mr. Hendron, I—I—I—"

"Never mind." The older man approached. "I think I know why you came. You wanted to be sure of the air before any of the rest of us left the ship."

Tony did not reply. Hendron took his arm. "So did I. I couldn't sleep. I had to inspect our future home. I came out on the ladder half an hour ago." Hendron chuckled. "Duquesne was on my heels. I hid. He's gone for a walk. I heard him fall down and swear. What do you think of it? Did you see the aurora?"

"No." Tony looked at the stars. He had a feeling that the sky overhead was not the sky to which he had been accustomed. The stars looked slightly mixed. As he stared upward, a crimson flame shot into the zenith from the horizon. It was followed by torches and sheets in all colors and shades. "Lord!" he whispered.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Hendron said softly. "Nothing like it on earth. It was in rippling sheets when I came out. Then in shafts—a colored cathedral. It made faint shadows of the landscape. I venture to say it's a permanent fixture. The gases here are different from those on earth. Different ionization of solar electrical energy. That red may be the neon. The blue—I don't know. Anyway—it's gorgeous."

"You mean—this thing will play overhead all night every night?"

"I think so. Coming and going. It seemed to me that it touched the ground over there—once." He pointed. "I

thought I could hear it—crackling faintly, swishing. It's going to make radio broadcasting bad; and it'll affect astronomical observation. But it is magnificent."

"Like the rainbow that came on Ararat," Tony said slowly.

"Lord! So it is! God's promise, eh? Tony—you're an odd fellow for a football-player. Football! What a thing to hover in the mind here! Come—let's see if we can find Duquesne. The wily devil wanted to be first on Bronson Alpha. He came out of the Ark like a shot. No. Wait—look."

TONY glanced toward the Ark. The lock was opening again. The aurora shone luminously on the polished sides, revealing the black rectangle of the open door in sharp contrast.

"Who is it? Hendron whispered.

"Don't know." Tony was smiling.

They watched the fourth man to touch the new soil make his painful descent and run across the still hot earth. They saw him stop, a few yards away, and breathe. They heard his voice ecstatically. Then—they heard him weep.

Hendron called: "Hello—James!"

Tony saw Eliot James undergo the unearthliness of hearing that voice come through the empty air. Then James approached them.

"How beautiful!" he whispered. "I'm sorry. I thought some one should try the air. And—I admit—I was keen to get out. Wanted to be first, I suppose. I'm humiliated—"

Again Hendron laughed. "It's all right, my boy. I understand. I understand all of us. It was an act of bravery. When I came out, I half expected you others would be along. It's in your blood. The reason you came here one by one, alone and courageously, is the reason I picked you to come here with me. You all think, feel, act independently. You also all act for the common welfare. It makes me rather happy. Come on; Duquesne went this way."

"Duquesne?" James repeated. Tony explained.

They hunted for a long time. Overhead the stars showed brightly; and underneath them in varying intensity, with ten thousand spangles, the aurora played symphonies of light. Behind them was the tall cylinder of the ship, and behind it the range of hills. Ahead of them as they walked they could hear the increasing murmur of the sea.

They found Duquesne sitting on a bluff-head overlooking the illimitable sea. He heard them coming and rose, holding out his hands.

"My friends! *Salut!*"

"I saw you pop out of the ship," Hendron said, "and I was sorry you fell down."

The Frenchman was crestfallen. "You were out here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ahead of me?"

"By a few minutes," Hendron answered.

Duquesne stamped his foot several times, and then laughed. "Well—you should be! But I thought to fool you. Duquesne, I told myself—the great Duquesne—shall be first to set foot on the new earth. But it was not to be. It was a sin. I even brought a small flag of France—my beautiful France—and planted it upon the soil."

"I saw it," Hendron said. "I took it down. We aren't going to have nations here. Just—people."

Duquesne nodded in the gloom. "That too is right. I am foolish. I am like six years old. But tonight we will forget all this, *n'est-ce pas?* We will be friends. Four friends. The mighty Cole 'Endron. The brilliant Monsieur James. The brave Tony Drake. And myself—Duquesne the great. Sit."

ON the outcrop of stone ledge they seated themselves. They looked and breathed and waited.

Occasionally one of them spoke. Usually it was Hendron—casting up from his thoughts between periods of silence memories of the past and plans for the future.

"We are here alone. I cannot help feeling that our other ship has in some way failed to follow us. If, in the ensuing days, we hear nothing, we may be sure it is lost. Your French confrères, Duquesne—failed. We must admit that it seems probable that others failed. Bronson Alpha belongs to us. It is sad—tragic. Ransdell is gone. Peter Vanderbilt is gone. Smith. That Taylor youngster you brought from Harvard. All the others. Yet—with all the world gone, who are we to complain that we have lost a few more of our friends?"

"Precisely!" exclaimed Duquesne emphatically. "And what are we, after all? What was that mankind, of our earth, which we alone perhaps survive to represent and reproduce?"



He had recoiled from his moment of inborn, instinctive patriotism, and become the scientist again.

"Is the creation of man the final climax toward which the whole Creation has moved? We said so, in the infancy of our thought, when we imagined the world made by God in six days, before we had any comprehension even of the nature of our neighboring stars, when we could not even have dreamed of the millions and millions of the distant stars shown us by our telescopes, when our wildest fancy would have failed before the facts of today—endless space spotted to the edges of time with spiral nebulae, each a separate 'universe' with its billions of suns like our own.

"Behind us lay, on our own earth, five hundred millions of years of evolution; and billions of years before that, while matter cooled and congealed, the world was being made—for us?

"Can we say so? Or is it that our existence is a mere accidental and possibly quite unimportant by-product of natural processes, which—as Jeans, the Englishman once suggested—really had some other and more stupendous end in view?"

"You mean," said Hendron, "perhaps it concerns only ourselves in our vanity, and not the universe at all, that any of us escaped from the cataclysm of earth's end and came here?"

"Exactly," pronounced Duquesne. "It is nothing—if we merely continue the earth—here. When I recollect the filth of our cities, the greed of individuals and of nations, the savagery of wars, the horrors of pauperism permitted to exist side by side with luxury and wealth, our selfishness, hates, diseases, filth—all the hideousness we called civilization—I can-

not regret that the world which was afflicted by us is flying in fragments, utterly incapable of rehabilitation, about the sun. On the other hand, now we are here; and how are we to justify the chance to begin again?"

TONY moved away from them. He was stirred with a great restlessness. He wandered toward the ship; and he saw, in that glowing, opalescent night, a woman's form; and he knew before he spoke to her, that it was Eve.

"I was sure you'd be out," he said.

"Tony!"

"Yes?"

"Here are you and I. Here!" She stooped to the ground and touched it; the dry fiber of a lichenlike grass was between her fingers. She pulled it, and stood with it in her hand. They had seen it, they both remembered; it was what had made the ground brown in the light of the dying day.

"This was green and fresh, Tony, perhaps ten million years ago; perhaps a hundred million. Then the dark and cold came; the very air froze and preserved it. Do you suppose our cattle could eat it?"

"Why not?" said Tony.

"What else may be here, Tony? How can we wait for the day?"

"We aren't waiting!"

"No; we're not." For they were walking, hand in hand like children, over the bare, rough ground. The amazing aurora of this strange world lighted them, and the soil smoothed, suddenly, under their feet. The change was so abrupt that it made them stare down, and they saw what they had stumbled upon; and they cried out together: "A road!"

The ribbon of it ran to right and left

—not clear and straight, for it had been washed over and blown over; but it was, beyond any doubt, a road! Made by what hands, and for what feet? Whence and whither did it run?

A hundred million years ago!

The clock of eternity ticked with the click of their heels on this hard ribbon of road, as they turned, hand in hand, and followed it toward the aurora.

"Where were they," said Tony, almost as if the souls of those a hundred million years dead might hear, "when they were whirled away from their sun? What stage had they reached? Is this one of their Roman roads on which one of their Varros was marching his men to meet a Hannibal at Bronson Alpha's Cannæ? What was at one end—and what still awaits us there? A Nineveh of Sargon saved for us by the dark and cold? Or was this a motor road to a city like our Paris of a year ago? Or was it a track for some vehicle we would have invented in a thousand more years? And is the city which we'll find, a city we'd never dreamed of? Whatever it was, their fate left it for us; whereas our fate—the fate of our world—" He stopped.

"I was thinking about it," said Eve. "Out there is space—in scattered stones circling in orbits of their own about the sun; the Pyramids and the Empire State Building, the Washington Monument and the Tomb of Napoleon, the Arch of Triumph! The seas and the mountains! Here the other thing happened—the other fate that could have been ours if the world had escaped the cataclysm. What sort were they who faced it here, Tony? Human, with bodies like our own? Or with souls like our own, but other shapes?"

"On this road," said Tony, "this road, perhaps, we'll see."

"And learn how they faced it, too, Tony; the coming dark and the cold. I think, if I had the choice, I'd prefer the cataclysm."

"Then you believe our world was better off?"

"Perhaps I wouldn't have—if we had stayed," amended Eve. "What happened here, at least left their world behind them."

"For us," said Tony.

"Yes; for us. What will we make of our chance here, Tony? Truly something very different?"

"How different do you feel, Eve?"

"Very different—completely strange even to myself, at some moments, Tony;

and then at other times—not different at all."

"Come here."

"Why?"

"Come here," he repeated, and drawing her close, he clasped her, and himself quivering, he could feel her trembling terribly. He kissed her, and her lips were hot on his. A little aghast, they dropped away.

"We seem to have brought the world with us. I can never give you up, Eve; or share you with anyone else."

"We're too fresh from the world, Tony, to know. We've a faith to keep with—"

"With whom? Your father?"

"With fate—and the future. Let's go on, Tony. See, the road turns."

"Yes."

"What's that?"

"Where?"

SHE moved off the road to the right, where stood something too square and straight-edged to be natural. Scarcely breathing, they touched it, and found metal with a cold, smooth surface indented under their finger-tips.

"A monument!" said Tony, and he burned a match. The little yellow flame lighted characters engraved into the metal—characters like none either of them had ever seen before, but which proclaimed themselves symbols of meaning.

Swiftly Tony searched the two faces of the metal; but nothing that could possibly be a portrait adorned it. There were decorations of strange beauty and symmetry. Amazing that no one, in all the generations and in all the nations of the world, had drawn a decoration like this! It was not like the Chinese or Mayan or Egyptian, Greek or Roman, or French or German; but different from each and all.

Tony caught his breath sharply as he traced it with his fingers.

"They had an artist, Eve," he said.

"With five hundred million years of evolution behind him."

"Yes. How beautifully this writing is engraved! Will we ever read it? . . . Come on. Come on!"

But the monument, if it was that, stood alone; and consideration of others, if not prudence, dictated that they return.

But they did not reënter the ship. Duquesne was determined to spend the first night on the ground; and Hendron and James agreed with him. James had

dragged out blankets from the Ark, and the five lay down on the ground of the new planet. And some of them slept.

TONY opened his eyes. The sun was rising into a sky not blue but jade green. A deep, bewildering color—the color of Bronson Alpha's celestial canopy.

There would be no more human beings who wrote poetry about the blue sky. They would shape their romantic stanzas—as the stanzas in those strange, beautifully engraved characters must be shaped, if they mentioned the sky—to the verdancy of the heavens.

Tony lifted himself on his elbow. Below him, the sea also was green. It had been gray on the steamy yesterday. But an emerald ocean was more familiar than an emerald sky. He watched the white water roll on the summits of swells until it was dispersed by the brown cliff. He looked back at the Ark. It stood mysteriously on the landscape—a perpendicular cylinder, shining and marvelous, enormously foreign to the bare, brilliant landscape. Behind it the chocolate colored mountains stretched into opalescent nowhere—the mountain into which the road ran, the road beside which stood the stele adorned by a decoration like nothing else that had been seen in the world.

Tony regarded his companions. Hendron slept on a curled arm. His flashing eyes were closed. His hair, now almost white, was disheveled on his white forehead. Beside him Duquesne slept, half-sitting, his arms folded on his ample abdomen, and an expression of deep study on his swarthy face. Eliot James sprawled on a ledge which the sun now was warming, his countenance relaxed, his lips parted, his straggling red beard metal-bright in the morning rays.

Eve slept, or she had slept, near to Tony; and now she roused. She was lovely in the yellow light, and looked far fresher than the men.

Their clothes were stained and worn; and none of them had shaved, so that they looked more like philosophical vagrants than like three of the greatest men produced in the Twentieth Century on the earth.

Tony watched Eve as she gazed at them, anxiously maternal. To be a mother in actuality, to become a mother of men, was to be her rôle on this reawakened world.

As she arose quietly, so as to disturb

none of the others, Tony caught her hand with a new tenderness. They set off toward their road together.

Suddenly Tony saw something that took the breath from his lungs. It was a tiny thing—on the ground. A mere splotch of color. He hurried toward it, not believing his eyes. He lay down and stared at it. In a slight damp depression was a patch of moss the size of his hand.

He lay prone to examine it as Eve stooped beside him in excitement like his own. He did not know mosses—the vegetation resembled any other moss, on earth. He recollected the hope that spores, which could exist in temperatures close to absolutely zero for long periods, had preserved on Bronson Alpha the power to germinate.

Mosses came—on earth—from spores; and here, reawakened by the sun, was a remnant of life that had existed eons ago, light-years away.

Tony jumped up and ran about on the terrain; a few feet away, Eve stooped again. Other plants were burgeoning. Mosses, ferns, fungi—vegetation of species he could not classify, but some surely represented growths larger than mere mosses.

He heaped Eve's hands and his own, and together they ran back to the three who were staring, as they earlier had gazed, at the green sky.

Then Duquesne saw what Eve and Tony held. "*Sacre nom de Dieu!*" He leaped to his feet. Hendron and James were beside him.

WITH one accord, they rushed toward the Space Ship.

"Get Higgins!" Hendron shouted. "He'll go mad! Think of it! A whole new world to classify! . . . And it means that we will live!"

Before they reached the sides of the ship, the lock opened. The gangplank dropped to earth. Von Beitz appeared in the aperture, and Hendron shouted to him the news.

People poured from the Ark; they stepped upon the new soil. They waved their arms. They stared at the hills, the sky, the sea. They breathed deep of the air. They handled the mosses, and ran about finding more of their own. They shouted, sang. They laughed and danced.

The first day on the new earth had begun.

THE END.

In the belief that nearly every life offers some experience so exciting as to merit record in print, we each month offer prizes for the best stories of this sort received. (For details see page 159.) First the wife of a civil engineer tells of being caught with her husband by an underground river.

Trapped in the Tunnel

By Mrs. E. S. Sanders

IN the winter of 1928 I joined my husband in a construction-camp in North Carolina, where his company was erecting a dam for power. The dam was about seven miles from the power-house, and to get the water to the power-plant, large pipe-lines were built. Where the mountains were too high to permit any other method, tunnels were bored, and lined with concrete. In the valleys, steel tubing was fitted into the tunnel entrances. There were three sixteen-inch manholes in the big steel pipe-line, one in the middle and one at each end. These were used by the crews in a check-up of the pipe before the water was turned on.

My husband was the inspector for the company; everyone called him Joe.

One night I was waiting in the office for orders, when the telephone rang.

As I lifted the receiver, a voice said: "Make final inspection of pipe and tunnel tonight—water to be turned in at eight-thirty in the morning." I hung up and called Joe at the field.

He came to the office, which served us as home, to get warmer clothes. As he was pulling on hip-boots, I asked casually: "Can't I go with you tonight, through the tunnel?" I expected him to say no, but instead he said: "Yeah, you can go. You can carry the extra flashlight, and the report blanks."

I quickly donned a pair of hip-boots, and sallied forth.

The steel contractors had one of their men at the pipe. He was a jolly Irish

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chap who went by the name of Ed. He was to help Joe check up.

One of the manholes had been left open, but the other two were shut and bolted. The ladder that we had to descend was a timber, two by ten, crossed at regular intervals by small planks. Not a very secure ladder, but down we went.

The inside of the pipe was cold and damp, little pools of water everywhere. I stood the pipe all right, but when we got to the tunnel, it gave me the creeps and when the men were through, we turned toward the manhole, glad that the work was over.

As I turned to follow, my light went out, and being some distance in the rear of the men, I was in almost complete darkness. Having a great fear of the dark, and being afraid of being left, I screamed, good and loud. Joe, thinking I was hurt, jumped and turned toward me. In some way his light slipped from his hand and crashed to the concrete floor. Ed's light was just a small one, and weak too; it didn't penetrate the darkness but a few feet.

We called a halt and tried to fix at least one of the lights, but soon found that no amount of fixing would give us a light. And when we started off again, we found we were lost!

We had walked, it seemed, for miles, when Ed said triumphantly:

"We are going the wrong way!"

"Of course we are; but how did you find it out?" asked Joe.

"Easy," answered Ed. "When the painters were in here, one of the boys painted this on the wall."

In the dim light, we could see the sign he was talking about—a skull and crossbones, with an arrow underneath pointing to the dam—in the same direction we were going. We looked at each other in dismay, for we had wasted precious time going in the wrong direction—time that might mean the difference between life and death to us, for already it was long after midnight, and we had no way of telling how far we had come.

We rested a few minutes, and started back the way we had come. Unless we reached the manhole in time—

We were tired and wet, when we sat down to rest. Ed and Joe tried to laugh and talk, but none of us was in a mood for jokes, and silence soon fell.

PERIENCES

Suddenly there was a sharp crack, followed by a deep rumbling roar—then the sullen voice of tons of water running. The roar of water filled the tunnel like thunder—and even as we stood there, a wave of water swirled around our feet—ankle-deep!

With an oath and a mighty shove Joe shouted: "Run, run! We got to beat the water to the manhole!"

I needed no encouragement after the first weak horror left me. Already I was running as I never had before, running from the wall of water that I knew would engulf us in a few minutes. I could hear the heavy breathing of the men behind me, but above that, the sound of roaring water, coming closer to us. We were knee-deep in water—and it was rising!

With my lungs on fire and my feet heavy as lead, I stumbled, slipped and fought my way along the tunnel toward the blessed out of doors. My breath came in gasps, and try as I would, I could not go any faster.

I almost laughed out loud. Why, this couldn't happen to me; it only happened in books! But don't think I dramatically told the men to go on and save themselves. No, that would have taken time and breath. I kept moving.

My dulled mind became aware of a hollow booming sound; I wondered what it could be. It took me a long time to realize that we were in the pipe, and the noise I heard was our feet on the steel floor. Only a short distance now to the manhole. Could we make it? We had to; we couldn't die like rats in a trap with safety so near. And then, as if to mock me, a big wave nearly took me off my feet.

It was hard going in the rising water, and I was weaving like a drunken man. We were in total darkness now, for Ed's light had gone out some time ago. This fact probably saved our lives, for while we were in the tunnel the moon had risen, and was sending tiny rays of light through the manhole. Ed and I were both too exhausted to notice it, but Joe's keen eyes caught the gleam on the wet wall. He had to catch us and show us, before we would believe him.

There before our eyes were the manhole and ladder! We had actually dodged the ladder in the dark, and but for Joe I shudder to think just how far



we would have gone before the now waist-high water would have caught us.

Gathering my remaining strength, I caught the highest rung I could reach, and pulled my tired body up and out of the manhole. Pulling myself out, I slid off the pipe to the ground. There I could only bury my face in the moist earth and shiver.

The men came down from the pipe, and for the first time I noticed that it was still night, though dawn was not far off. We listened to the water in the pipe for a while, and suddenly we knew the water was falling. It didn't roar any more, but had sunk to a murmur.

"I'd better report this," said Joe. "Something has happened at the dam."

He was gone some time, and when he returned, I could see he was worried.

"The dam gates are O. K., and the keeper says no water has been turned into the pipe," he told us. "They are sending a crew over to investigate it. . . . I'd better take you home. Probably the tunnel has collapsed."

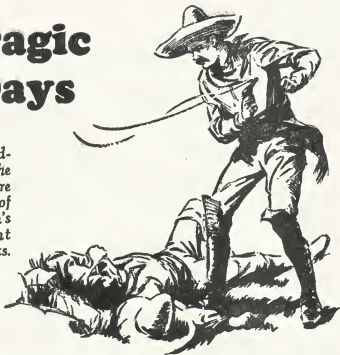
He did take me home and it was next afternoon before I found out the trouble. A section of the tunnel had become weakened by an underground lake, and had fallen, thereby draining the lake into the tunnel. We had been in plenty danger, for the water had risen high enough to have drowned us.

I was surprised, on looking in the mirror the next day to find my hair its natural color. Now I don't believe that blonde hair turns gray, for if ever mine had a chance, it was the night we were lost in a tunnel.

The Tragic Ten Days

The war correspondent who gave us "The News of Battle" here tells another story of a newspaper man's part in important and exciting events.

By Gerald Brandon



ONE day the wires between Mexico City and Vera Cruz, premier Mexican seaport, went dead.

At first it was thought to be a hurricane or an earthquake, but the truth leaked out during the course of a few hours: the garrison of Vera Cruz had disavowed allegiance to the government.

I accepted an assignment from the Associated Press and started out for Vera Cruz, which is three hundred miles away by the railroad.

At Orizaba, with one hundred and fifty miles still to go, train service stopped. It was thought that bridges and trestles had been burned by the revolutionists to embarrass troop movements. Together with a score other passengers who wanted to continue the trip, I joined a caravan that proceeded on horseback.

At the end of the first day's ride we found it impossible to hire horses to go farther, so that night, accompanied by two chaps who were bound to throw in with the rebels, I borrowed a hand-car from a section gang down the track and started rolling down-hill toward Vera Cruz. This is one of the steepest grades in the world, the climb from the coast to the pass over the mountains into Mexico City being approximately eleven thousand feet.

That was a wild ride. I believe we averaged better than fifty miles an hour. The pump-car got away from us, and had

there been a dynamited trestle on the way we could not have saved ourselves. At length we reached the sand-dunes that surrounded Vera Cruz.

I found that General Felix Diaz had persuaded his cousin Colonel Diaz Ordaz, commander of the Vera Cruz garrison, to throw in with the revolution. The Mexican navy, however, had remained loyal to the Government and was threatening to bombard the barracks. The rebels had about fifteen hundred men and a large store of arms and ammunition.

During the next few days Diaz negotiated with the gunboats, it being agreed that these should remain neutral until after the battle that was expected with the army that Madero was sending overland to attack Vera Cruz.

The Federal army eventually arrived. There were five thousand men under General Beltran, who sent emissaries to demand Diaz' surrender.

Diaz came back with a suggestion that Beltran and his forces join the revolution. Beltran answered that his honor as a soldier made this impossible, but he was willing to be defeated in a decorous way by Felix Diaz, whose father had been Beltran's commanding officer thirty years before, and whose uncle, Porfirio Diaz, had been President of Mexico for thirty-five years, and had given Beltran his last four promotions.

I was present at all these negotiations. It was arranged that Beltran should advance on Vera Cruz, and that a sortie of the garrison should capture his artillery, while Beltran and his staff should be surrounded and made prisoners by the rebels after a glorious sham battle.

The Federals under Beltran advanced to the attack. From the roof of the municipal palace General Felix Diaz watched the sham battle. I was attached to his staff and kept a group of messengers busy taking flashes of the developments to the cable office for transmission to the Associated Press.

The artillery fire was deafening, but neither attackers or defenders suffered casualties. During the entire day's fighting less than one hundred were hurt, and they were principally onlookers and a few officers who were killed by their men to satisfy personal grudges.

At length we saw Beltran and his staff advance into the city, and we went forward to receive his surrender according to the arrangement.

To our surprise, we found ourselves ringed in by a circle of machine-guns, and we were all taken prisoners. It appears that Beltran had originally intended to carry out his arrangement; but Madero, distrusting him, sent General Aurelio Blanquet behind him with ten thousand men and forced him to double-cross the rebels.

I was in a deuce of a fix. My last cable to the Associated Press had stated that Beltran was about to be captured by Diaz, and here I was a prisoner and unable to explain what had happened. For two days the entire world was under the impression that Diaz had won the battle, for Beltran maintained a strict censorship over the cables.

After a couple of days in the military prison I was haled before Beltran, who told me that I could be shot for having participated in the revolution.

I was not able to make any defense, except to indicate to Beltran my knowledge of his intended treason. Beltran, on my promise not to write the truth of the situation during his lifetime, agreed to set me free if I would leave Mexico immediately.

I did, and this is the first time I have told the true story of the battle of Vera Cruz. Beltran has been dead for years.

Mexico City's "Decena Trágica" or tragic ten days, is the subject of this chapter of my reminiscences. It is a tale of the blackest treason and the most

ruthless wholesale slaughter in the history of the New World.

General Felix Diaz, captured at the taking of Vera Cruz, was held in San Juan de Ulloa fortress for several months. Upon his complaint that the dampness of this island prison was harmful to his health, he was transferred to the military prison in Mexico City, where the garrison had already been corrupted by his agents.

One morning Felix Diaz at the head of an infantry regiment, Bernardo Reyes leading a group of malcontents from Monterrey, and the cadet corps of the Talpam Military Academy, marched on the presidential palace in Mexico City.

A few machine-guns on the palace roof held off the rebels with great losses, and Diaz retreated to the National Arsenal, where he made himself strong, leaving General Reyes, the titular head of the revolution, dead on the square before the palace.

The Arsenal occupied a square block of buildings in the very heart of the city, and in it were practically all the Federal stores of arms and ammunition. With some three thousand men Diaz made the position practically impregnable, and repulsed attacks with ease.

Madero turned over the supreme command of his forces to Victoriano Huerta, who had recently returned from a victorious campaign against Pascual Orozco in Chihuahua. Had Madero borne in mind my warning that Huerta was a traitor, he might be alive today, and the history of Mexico might have been different.

THE first few days Huerta tried to storm the Arsenal. Finding it too hard a nut to crack, however, he entered into secret negotiations with the rebels. The garrison of Mexico City was composed principally of irregular troops, most of whom were loyal to the President. In order to get rid of these men, Huerta would send them in close formation to attack the rebels, who would mow them down like chaff with machine-guns and field artillery that commanded all the approaches to the Arsenal.

At the end of ten days, when only the old line regiments of the Federal army remained intact, Huerta placed the President under arrest and took over the government, immediately making peace with Felix Diaz and his men.

A few days later Diaz found it safest to flee from Mexico, and for a period Huerta was supreme.

Huerta had gone through a form of legality in order to preserve the international amenities. He claimed to have acted under instructions of the Mexican Senate when he arrested the President. He produced documents that purported to be the resignations of Madero as President and Pino Suarez as Vice-President, which left the then Secretary of State as provisional executive. This man then appointed Huerta as Secretary of State and resigned in his favor.

Press censorship was extremely severe. All the local correspondents of American newspapers were warned not to send out dispatches unfavorable to Huerta.

I took exception to this attempt at official censorship and wrote my stuff as I saw it. I was the only correspondent to do so. When it was officially reported that all the Mexican revolutionists had offered to recognize Huerta, I rode into the mountains and obtained signed statements from Zapata, Almazan and other chieftains expressing their intention to fight him to the death.

Then Madero, who had been held a prisoner, was killed in what was reported an attempt to escape. I obtained an affidavit from the undertaker who laid him out, to the effect that the President's body had been mangled by torturers. . . .

Later the New York *World* sent a fearless correspondent to Mexico, and his stuff coincided with mine.

The upshot was that the United States withheld recognition from Huerta.

I was arrested in Cuernavaca on my return from a visit to Zapata, and taken to Mexico City where General Blanquet, Huerta's secretary of war, said to me: "The President bids me tell you that he is tired of your constant opposition, and has made up his mind to be rid of you. You will be shot tomorrow unless you immediately retract all the lies you have been writing against Huerta."

But the following day I was taken to Vera Cruz, ostensibly to be deported as an undesirable foreigner. Huerta had lost his nerve about shooting an American correspondent, lest this spoil his chance of recognition by Washington. I was taken aboard the Ward Liner *Ori- zaba*, and then taken off again and sent to San Juan de Ulloa fortress, a prisoner. For ten days I was lost to the world.

A week later a friendly officer got word to the American consul, who cabled to my folks, to my paper and to the State Department.

Strong representations were made to Huerta, and I was released, being deported from Mexico with the threat of instant execution if I ever returned.

In the meantime Carranza, Maitorena and Villa in the north of Mexico had risen in arms against Huerta, refusing to recognize him as President, and leading what became known as the Constitutionalist movement. I immediately crossed the border and joined Villa, who for months hopped around from Chihuahua to Coahuila, building up a force of men that eventually reached the surprising total of fifty thousand.

AT the start, Villa had a hard time. He could not risk joining battle prematurely, and merely raided weakly garrisoned villages and ranches, where he could pick off a dozen Federals and add their arms and supplies to his stores. The men became tired and dissatisfied.

One night after a particularly hard ride we made a dry camp, and one of Villa's lieutenants, a chap named Escobar who was *compadre* of the chief, blurted out his displeasure:

"I am of no use to you now, *compadre*, and I want to go home. Some day when you are ready to fight the enemy, call on me and I will return. What is the use of this eternal running away? I might as well be at home with my family until the time for action comes."

"Have you made up your mind to leave, *compadre*?" queried Villa sadly. "Adios, then; and may you have a pleasant voyage." And Villa opened his arms to embrace Escobar, Mexican fashion, while we all looked on and wondered.

As the two men embraced, Villa pulled Escobar's gun from its holster and shot him through the head.

"Anyone else want to go back to their homes?" Villa thundered at the party. And we buried Escobar beneath a pile of stones, without saying a word.

A week later Villa waxed sentimental and told me how he had hated to kill his *compadre*. "If I had let him abandon me, what would have been the effect on my other men?" he queried.

Just at this time came the assassination of the Austrian Archduke at Sarajevo, and my paper sent me to New York, where an expedition was being fitted out to cover the war that was expected in the Balkans. . . .

My experiences in France, where I was a soldier, and not a newspaper man, do not properly form part of this narrative.



Loose Screws

Even in a quiet northern New Hampshire village, exciting adventure may be encountered.

By **Charles H. Bowie**

IN 1912 I was bookkeeper and paymaster for the late Oliver Barton, manufacturer of excelsior. Both of his mills were in small villages; one was sixteen miles northeast, the other fourteen miles west, from his office town.

The mill crews were paid every two weeks, and the day that the trouble happened I was due at the western mill. It had snowed heavily from some time in the night until noon that Friday, blanketing northern New Hampshire more than a foot deep.

Mr. Barton and the office stenographer, Lucile Vaugan, had assisted me in making up the pay-roll that day, the amount being over seventeen hundred dollars.

Besides the pay-roll satchel I had an old tire-chain bag containing a dozen boxes of wood screws for the mill.

After the money was put up, I got the revolver from the private office desk, whirled the cylinder to be sure it was fully loaded, then stepped to the main office and dropped it into the right breast pocket of my ulster. It might have been fifteen minutes later, when ready to start for the mill, that I put on my ulster and noticed the revolver was in the *left* breast pocket. In changing it to the right pocket, a glance showed me that its cylinder was empty.

I could hardly believe my eyes. A few minutes previous, it had undoubtedly been loaded.

Acting on a quickly formed plan, I went into the inner office and locked the

door, hastily took the money from the bag, then opening a box of screws dumped them loose into the satchel. Then I stuffed the screw box full of pay envelopes, made the same substitution with six more boxes of screws, locked the satchel, put the seven screw boxes of money into the tire-chain bag with the five unopened boxes of screws, reloaded the revolver,—taking extra cartridges,—and started hurriedly toward the street. Halfway downstairs I met John Vance, Mr. Barton's son-in-law, who acted as chauffeur and guard on my mill visits.

"I thought you were never coming. We ought to have started an hour ago. The roads must be hellish," he growled angrily as he grabbed the chain bag, strode hurriedly to the roadster, raised the back cover and tossed the bag inside.

I placed the pay-roll satchel between my feet and as we whirled away in a cloud of chain-thrown snow, my gloveless hand clutched the revolver in my right-hand breast pocket.

A year previous, Mr. Barton's daughter Catherine had eloped with John and they had married. This had been a decided jolt to my pride—for I had planned on marrying Catherine myself.

John was a regular grizzly bear in build, looks and deportment. But there could be no doubt of his love for Catherine—and she fairly adored her big red-headed John.

I had ceased to be disgruntled at losing Catherine, but had never trusted John, and as we rushed away toward the mill I suspected him of tampering with my revolver, recalling that he had been alone in the office before we started.

I expected no violence, but thought there might be an attempt to change the money satchel for another, before we reached the mill.

When going through the woods three miles from our destination, we met a big automobile containing two men. It slowed, but did not stop. A masked man leaped from it and covered us with his revolver.

"Throw out that money bag damn' quick!" he snarled.

John's revolver appeared in his hand as by magic, and he snapped it three times futilely. His revolver was empty!

The thug shot at John, his bullet shattering our windshield. John roared like an enraged lion, as he leaped to the ground.

In the meantime I fired three shots: only one at the villain on foot,—fearing I might hit John,—and two at the car driver. The last, I have always believed, took effect. The driver stopped the big car and while cussing volubly, sent two shots in our direction, one glancing from our front fender.

John had leaped at his antagonist like a panther, grabbed his pistol-arm and forced it upward, then with a smashing uppercut that started low, knocked the ruffian senseless. The bandit car sped away as fast as loose snow would permit. John grabbed the unconscious man's revolver and fired its remaining three bullets at the fleeing car.

"Are you hurt, John?" I inquired a minute later, seeing a look of pain on his face as he fairly threw the half-dazed gunman into the seat beside me.

"I'm all right. Don't you worry," answered John grimly. Yet I learned later that a bullet had raked his side deeply.

I never recalled, until the encounter was all over, that we had risked our lives protecting seven boxes of loose, mixed screws!

At the village, a constable took charge of John's prisoner and carried him by train to Berlin.

As we left the mill a disgruntled mechanic shouted, "What in blazes you folks tryin' to do, in the office? Save money by getting mixed screws?"

Lucile, the stenographer, disappeared from town that afternoon while we were absent; it was evident who had surreptitiously unloaded our revolvers.

While telling Mr. Barton of our experience, John looked at me whimsically and remarked, "I always knew you had a screw loose somewhere!"

Aboard a

A young Army officer visiting a ranch in the wild-horse country finds himself in utmost peril on a primeval battlefield.

SOME years ago I was visiting on a ranch in western Canada. Here in spring wild horses migrate from their southerly wintering grounds, in small bands and in larger droves, each lorded over by an alert stallion.

These wild horses have always constituted a nuisance to settlers in those regions, chiefly because of their habit of enticing away good farm animals.

Such had been the case with the ranch at which I was visiting. Only the previous fall three fine, blooded standard-bred trotting mares had disappeared with a wild herd.

One night a cowpuncher employed on the ranch came in and reported having sighted a band of wild horses near a place called Pine Spring. He had recognized two of the blooded mares lost the previous fall.

At daylight next morning a troop of five horsemen set out for Pine Spring. I went along, riding Murat, a big blood-bay stallion. He was a magnificent animal, deep-girthed and powerful.

After several hours' riding which had taken us into a stretch of wild country, we topped a ridge and came suddenly upon the herd.

Out from a clump of willows trotted a big gray stallion. He was truly a magnificent animal, big-boned and powerful.

Suddenly he sighted us and stiffened where he stood. In the same instant his warning whistle came sharply to our ears. Again he whistled and the whole herd came instantly to the alert. Another whistle, a loud neigh—and following the gray leader, the entire band struck off down the valley at full gallop.

Down the valley we raced after the thundering herd, leaping ditches and boulders that lay in our path. A small group of animals on the left wing of the herd split from the main bunch and veered off to the left up a draw that led out of the valley. This group contained the

Fighting Stallion

By **Stanley M. Nevin**

three valuable ranch mares, and my companions thereupon set off after them.

Riding Murat over on the right wing and well in the lead, I failed to notice the absence of the other riders and raced on alone. Before I realized what was happening I found myself in the center of a grassy clearing with sheer rock walls rising up on three sides, and all about me a milling, squealing band of terror-stricken wild horses. Suddenly I heard a wild scream; it was the challenge of a mad stallion! There, charging in on me from the edge of the circle, came the gray. His eyes gleamed with fury, his ears were laid flat and his lips writhed back to expose cruel, glistening teeth. His flaring nostrils were an angry red.

By a desperate effort with hand and spur I managed to wheel Murat enough to escape the first charge; but I lost control of him then. For all his domestication, the will to battle was strong in him. With a loud, challenging whinny, he reared to meet the next charge of that gray demon. They came together with incredible violence. The shock nearly unseated me, but I clung frantically with legs and hands. They locked their teeth into each other, hung quivering a moment like two fighting bulldogs, then tore apart with a grinding and snapping of teeth.

The gray had got his teeth into the cheek-piece of Murat's bridle. As they tore apart, the strap was broken, the bit fell loose, and the head-stall slipped back over the neck and fell to the ground. I flung the reins from me and clung desperately to the mane.

Time after time they charged upon each other with unabated fury, striking savagely with their forefeet, then locking in deadly embrace to the sickening sound of rending flesh and grating teeth. Then they would break loose and whirl for the kick. In this Murat had the best of it, being shod with sharp heel-calks, while the gray was barefooted.



But those hoofs were hard as flint, and the power behind them was that of a triphammer. Twice they struck the saddle, rending the leather like a knife-blade, and once I received a glancing blow on one leg, numbing it to the hip.

For what seemed hours the battle went on, waxing more and still more fierce as each strove for the mastery. By now they were covered with blood. The gray stallion was a terrible sight. His beautiful coat was all dappled with gore. One eye was torn out and hung on his cheek. There were great rents in his flesh over back and loins. Red foam flew from his nostrils as he still screamed a challenge.

To dismount would mean certain death, so I clung to the saddle with fear in my heart and the acrid smell of sweat strong in my nostrils. The bay lost his footing once and I thought we were gone—but he recovered in time to meet the rush of the other. However, I knew he was weakening. His breathing was labored and his heart thumped violently against my legs. Handicapped by my weight, and the loss of blood, he still fought gamely on.

Suddenly, while they were in a kicking tangle, I heard a snapping sound and the gray stallion fell, with one hind leg broken at the hock joint. He struggled to rise—but the fight was over.

Murat raised his head and neighed proudly, then staggered a few steps and stood with drooping head, utterly spent.

Presently I heard a yell and three of the men came galloping in. I was still too shaken to talk, but it needed only a glance to see what had taken place.

"He's one bad *hombre*, dat gray horse!" commented old Cœur D'Alene Charley.



The president of the Southern Association of Baseball Clubs tells what it is like to be really unpopular.

By John D. Martin

"Fanned"

MY most exciting experience befell me at a baseball game, down in good old New Orleans.

For thirteen years I have been president of the Southern Association of Baseball Clubs. The president of a baseball league is a sort of pseudo-police-judge. It is his official duty to decide protested games, and to administer fines and penalties to refractory ball players. Several seasons ago, after searching my conscience, I decided a certain protested game against New Orleans in favor of Birmingham. The controversy involved a question of fact as to a ground-rule which, to become effective, required mutual agreement of the opposing managers. My ruling rested upon my belief in the truth of the statement of the Birmingham manager, that he had not agreed to the rule in question.

Following the public announcement of my decision, New Orleans fans and newspapers broke loose like hell in Texas. Then came anonymous letters, challenging me to visit the Crescent City, under penalty of death or dismemberment.

Now, I had always enjoyed my trips to the land of milk and honey, oysters and pompano, and I had many friends there. Furthermore, it is fatal to the standing of a baseball official to show fear. It was, therefore, squarely up to me to go to New Orleans and attend the game, which I had ordered played over. This contest was scheduled to be played as the second part of a Sunday double-header. The two contending clubs were competing for first place in league standing, and were only a few games apart. The time was late in August—the baseball equivalent of the home stretch.

Arriving at the park a few minutes ahead of game time, I found a sardine-box crowd assembled—the largest baseball attendance in the history of sport-loving New Orleans. Scorning in a huff the proffered box seat, because the local management had participated in the storm of criticism, I determined to stand while spectating. Also—I might be less conspicuous!

Boxes, grandstands, bleachers and circus seats, temporarily pressed into service, had been filled to overflowing, and the crowd was surging upon the field. Restraining ropes gave way against the pressure. The territory from center field halfway to second base was occupied by an army of invading fans. Cordons of police were powerless in their effort to check the flow. It seemed incredible that a game of baseball could be played in the space which was left. But Bill Brennan, the best umpire in the world (everybody else is entitled to his own opinion), was umpire-in-chief for the day. I had carefully attended to that. If a living arbiter could get in an official ball game under tough conditions, I knew that he could.

An incendiary home-town bug, fearful that the crowd had not been stirred up to adequate hostility, presented the Birmingham manager with a cherry tree and a hatchet. If the manager is as truthful as I proclaimed him, he will admit he would have gladly *buried* the hatchet—in the head of the donor!

After much milling around, the crowd on the field was coaxed by the police to back up a few feet, and the game was on. It is a bit of exaggeration to call the ensuing farce a game. Under necessary

(Continued on page 160)

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Why don't you write?

ground-rules, lolly-pop flies into the customers back of second base went for two-baggers; a foul in the air was as safe as a quail on the wing from the gun of a Chinese soldier. The eyewitnesses massed up to the coaching-lines on both sides of the diamond. But the struggle was for blood; and blood flowed freely. Frequent fights interrupted play. The star event was waged when a belligerent fan swapped punches with the visitors' scrappy second baseman. The longest intermission lasted half an hour, before sweating officers of the law could clear the field. There were twenty-two additional intermissions of shorter duration. But the game, like the wounded snake, "dragged its slow length along."

In the third inning my presence was detected.

"That's him!" the shrill voice of a woman cried out. "That's him—that robber Martin! Kill him!"

The men around her responded to the Amazon urge. "We'll get him after the game!" promised a booming voice.

Vituperation poured down upon me.

I turned and faced my detractors. Hisses, booes, catcalls and glittering gems of vocal derision greeted me. Inwardly I boiled; with my face flushed with rage, I steadily faced the crowd.

Crowd psychology is curious. When you face an unjust assailant, you shame him into silence. Though backed by the multitude, few men, when wrong, will look you in the eye and condemn you. . . . The tirade against me subsided.

I turned my back and concentrated my attention upon the game. The clamor for my blood broke loose again. I tried to ignore their yelling, and to become absorbed in watching the game.

A sack of peanuts, thrown at long range, struck the back of my head. Only the peanuts were damaged.

"Sign him!" the crowd yelled, in approval of the accurate aim of the hurler.

Momentarily I expected pop-bottles to follow. My sole safeguard against such attack was the danger that even an expert marksman could not single-shot me in that packed-in mass of humanity. A pop-bottle shower intended for just me was quite likely to rain on others. Evidently the crack-shot bottle-throwers reasoned as I did, and were afraid to take the chance of missing my cranium.

My time for real trouble would arrive after the game, I comforted myself. But my peace of mind did not last long. It soon became manifest that I was in for

an attack at close quarters, and it seemed that the attack would come soon. Three burly young men had wedged into my immediate vicinity, and now encompassed me closely. The husky on my right flank had cauliflower ears. The young bruiser on my left had a bashed-in nose; and a quick glance backward at the rear-rank man convinced me that he packed a better punch than either of the others, with about two hundred and ten pounds of solid brawn behind it.

Now, I am an office athlete. Also, I am forty-eight years old. Any one of those birds could have manhandled me easily.

"Well, what will be, will be!" was the most nonchalant thought I could think. Perhaps, after all, I had a licking coming to me. Hadn't I invited it, by defying the storm of popular opinion and flaunting myself at that game?

A RAUCOUS voice from high up in the grandstand called down:

"Hey, Martin! Whadda you done with that money Birmingham gave you?"

The hard-visaged man on my right looked around, gazed up toward my vociferous insulter, and yelled:

"Say! You guy up there. . . . I sees you. . . . Can de chatter. Can de chatter!" Then, turning to me, my unexpected friend said in the most respectful and friendliest manner: "Don't pay him no note, Jedge. I'm wid you!"

"Me and him both," chirped my left flanker.

"Me too, Jedge," assured the big boy behind me.

Did their voices sound good? As good as the voices of *Athos*, *Porthos* and *Aramis*, the three Musketeers, sounded to *D'Artagnan*, when they uttered their rallying call: "All for one and one for all!"

The three modern musketeers stuck to me like brothers, throughout the rest of the game. Their motive I never knew. It may be that I had saved them from losing bets on the protested game. Or perhaps the management of the New Orleans Club had secretly furnished me better than police protection.

But even with my volunteer bodyguard, I believe that I would not have got away from the park unscathed, had New Orleans lost the game—which ended after five hours of play, with the score 21 to 10.

Experiences similar to mine frequently fall to the lot of an umpire; but to a league president, such episodes come only often enough to be eventful.

Your Opinion

WE do not, as a rule, publish letters received from our readers. We are, however, tremendously interested in your opinions and deeply grateful to those who are so kind as to voice them. For one of the most difficult aspects of an editorial job is to appraise the value, to the people who buy the magazine, of this or that item among the fifteen to twenty separate contributions in the book.

DO you, for example, object to an occasional story which has a so-called "unhappy" ending? "The Eternal Light," in this issue, ends with the death of the hero. To us it seemed a story of triumph in spite of its tragedy—and one of the finest things we have read in some time. So too, "The Game of Death," "The Littlest Ghost" and "A Warrior Goes Home" in recent previous issues; they dealt, each of them, with a physical tragedy; but their primary theme was a spiritual achievement.

HERE in the office we have been specially interested in that extraordinary novel "When Worlds Collide" which comes to its impressive climax in this issue. And a number of people have asked: "Isn't there a sequel coming? Shouldn't another novel be written of the experiences of these daring pilgrims from Earth on the strange reawakened planet that gives them refuge?" What do you our readers think about that—about the possibilities of a story wherein a group of people escaped from this earth could attempt to remake a world nearer to the heart's desire?

THE only criticism of the magazine that has been expressed to us of late deals with this matter of serials: some readers apparently feel that we devote too much space to them, or continue them over too long a period. And this touches on another editorial problem: For to run as long a story as a Tarzan novel or "When Worlds Collide" entire isn't possible without swamping the magazine with one sort of material. We appreciate, however, the disappointment of having to wait too long for a conclusion. And for this reason we have divided Mr. Bechdolt's fine "Breakers Ahead" into three installments only—big ones. And we have scheduled no new serial for next month, but instead shall offer two lively novellettes and an extra quota of short stories.

—The Editor

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